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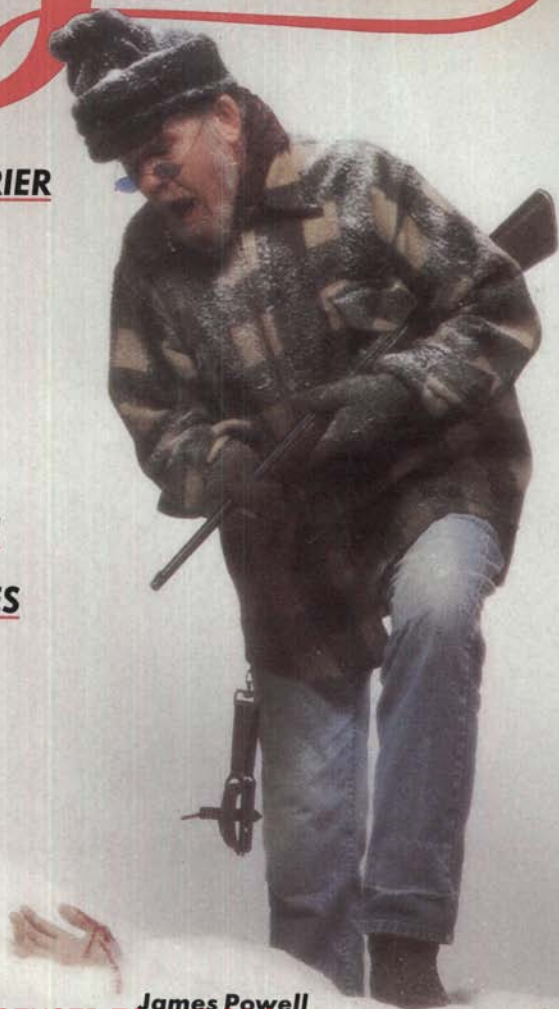
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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN

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a **NEW** short story by

NELL LAMBURN

One of our readers took time out to write us: "There's usually at least one gem of a human-interest tale in each issue of EQMM and these I learn from as well as enjoy. Specifically I'm thinking of stories by William Bankier, Clark Howard, and in the July issue 'Tom's Thatch' by Nell Lamburn is priceless." To which we say thank you and we're sure you'll also enjoy this chilling new story from Nell Lamburn.

"Daddy—Daddy, don't leave us!" Teresa cried. But he hadn't even heard her and so she'd flung herself at her mother, burying her face against the soft body. Her father didn't love her. Then her mother must . . .

CHARITY CHILD

by **NELL LAMBURN**

When Amanda Sweetman's divorce came through, she took half the proceeds from the London house sale in one hand, her daughter by the other, and fled, humiliated, to a cottage in Wiltshire.

It was the prettiest thatched cottage, really, its walls smoothly bloomed by grey-blue flint, the garden flanked by meadows and the four other cottages that were all that remained of the hamlet of Fiveton.

The interior, according to the enthusiastic agent, had potential. *Enormous* potential. The way he mouthed it made it seem the most desirable asset in the world, a rich, luxurious word on a par with yachts and Rolls Royces and racehorses. But not to Amanda Sweetman. She liked it just the way it was: she had no intention of changing the old Rayburne stove or the cracked lino on the kitchen floor.

© 1986 by Nell Lamburn.

She wasn't going to paint the stained walls or mend the drooping ceiling.

"Don't you *see*, Teresa darling," she cried excitedly, clapping her hands so that her bangles from Bangladesh tinkled and clinked, "that this is a *palace* compared to the homes of millions and millions of people throughout the world? We're really terribly terribly lucky."

But Teresa didn't think so. She hated it. She hated the little leaded panes, the damp wet-leaves smell, the gloomy low rooms. Hated the isolation at the end of the long unlit lane. She didn't care about the homeless millions. She cared that she'd been plucked from her bright London house, her nice school, and the weekly visits to her father.

"I hate it—I hate it—" she howled that first night. "I want to go home!"

In the budding beech trees over the river, the barn owl echoed her howl and her mother cried, "This *is* your home, Teresa. We are two against the world now that Daddy has left us."

But this, Teresa knew, as she listened to her mother's sandals slapping the steep elm-wood stairs, wasn't strictly true. Oh, her father had left them all right, but only because there was no room for him in his wife's life. For Amanda Sweetman was much given to charitable works. Oxfam, Save the Children, International Red Cross, Refugees, the Blind—they were strange correspondents in a divorce case, yet these were what had driven Mr. Sweetman to find solace in the arms of Another.

Ever since she'd been old enough to understand, Teresa had listened to the arguments through the thin walls of her home.

"Charity begins at home."

"But we're so fortunate, Damien, we should repay society."

"Damn society, I want privacy in my own home."

"Think of all those with no front doors to shut, no *home* even—"

"Well, tough bananas—"

"Oh, Damien, how could you be so *cruel*?" Tears then, and her father's mirthless laugh.

"Cruel? Is it cruel to mind sharing my house with the underprivileged of the whole world? To *mind* coming home after a day's work to find no dinner, the house a pigsty, and you playing host to half the charity workers of London?"

"But it's such a convenient place, so central—"

"Pull the other one. They know a sucker when they see one. They've worked so long for charity they think they deserve it, too!"

"Oh, Damien, that's not true—" More tears, and in the beginning,

when Teresa was quite small, there'd be other sounds: little moans and whispers and half smothered words. But as she grew older, those became rare, and instead there'd be slamming doors, even front doors, and next day silences and awful politeness. Then Teresa's little fingers would grip her needles tighter as she knitted yet another blanket square, her tiny tongue pop out as swift as an adder's to lick the stacks of begging envelopes.

"*Teresa helps me! Teresa doesn't mind! Teresa thinks of others!* But then *Teresa's* middle name is Charity!" Which it was. Amanda Sweetman had set her heart on it being her first, but her husband had won that and she'd had to be content with naming her daughter after a living saint instead.

Her father would look at her then with something akin to dislike, and Teresa, petrified, would set to with even more zeal, because if her father wasn't going to love her, then her mother must. And as she grew older, it became a craving, an obsession, this desire for love: an overwhelming urge, a necessity to living, just as eating or drinking or going to the lavatory. And alongside this desire grew a loathing of those unknown millions with their fly-blotched faces and their distended tummies, their outstretched, empty hands and black, blank eyes. Those starving, miserable millions that were breaking up her home, seducing her mother from her rightful role of loving her and her father.

In the beginning, when she was quite small, she'd sometimes grumbled and whined and seen her mother's pretty round face go cold.

"I'm disappointed in you, Teresa," she would say softly, sadly. "You've let me down." Or "I find it hard to love so *selfish* a child."

Fear, then, had gagged her and she'd set to with greater zeal to knit and sew and help at bazaars and spend her holidays at coffee mornings, until Amanda Sweetman's friends said admiringly, "What a *good* girl Teresa is!"

But they couldn't see inside her mind, they didn't know what she really thought.

"Oh, she is a good girl!" Her mother would ruffle her daughter's smooth, silky hair. "I don't know what I'd do without her."

Then, for Teresa, it would all be worthwhile.

She never really noticed when her father began to go away for weekends. Perhaps because the house was always packed with people.

"It's—it's like a meeting place—a staging post in our struggle

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against poverty and famine!" Teresa had heard her mother exclaim excitedly more than once, her large brown eyes aswirl with emotion, her long fingers with their silver Indian rings clasped to her batiked bosom. Teresa wished, and wasn't quite sure why she wished, that her mother wouldn't wear those loose gapy sort of cotton dresses which always seemed too large. But nobody else minded. In fact, the uncles seemed actually to like it, the way they stared.

At first, Teresa hadn't really been able to distinguish one uncle from another. They all had beards—scrubby, untidy beards which couldn't make up their minds whether they were stubble or for real. They wore open-necked shirts and jeans and sandals from Pakistan and talked of artesian wells and relief posts, cholera and high-protein diets. But Uncle Oxfam always smelt of sweat and Uncle Red Cross had a funny laugh: Uncle Save the Children picked his nose—but quite nicely—and Uncle African Refugee drank an awful lot of beer.

Sometimes after Teresa had put herself to bed on Saturday nights, Uncle Oxfam would stay on to cook some new dish he'd brought back from India, something nourishing with beans or rice or lentils. The sharp, spiced smells would seep up to where Teresa lay in bed, she'd hear Uncle Oxfam's deep laugh and that murmur of voices just too low to distinguish separate words, and the feeling of being unwanted would screw her eyes tight up, and she'd bite her pretty Hong Kong duvet cover to stop the trembling of her chin.

Once, but only once, she'd trailed downstairs on the pretext she was hungry, too. Uncle Oxfam seemed to be whispering something in her mother's ear and her mother had had such a funny look, all flushed and excited, as if she were terribly out of breath. But when she saw Teresa, she was angry.

"Come on, come on, Mandy!" Uncle Oxfam had just laughed, deeply, as if he were rather pleased with himself. "The poor kid's hungry. Come, Teresa, come and sit on my knee." But Teresa, not liking his smell or her mother's expression, had gone miserably back to bed.

Not many Saturdays afterward, a woman had come to the house, very late, and there'd been terrible shoutings that had sent Teresa scrabbling under the duvet. She hadn't seen Uncle Oxfam again after that.

Her father told them, quite conversationally one morning as he

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left for the office, that he would not be returning and would collect his belongings later.

"I've had it," he said coarsely, picking up his grey-metal briefcase. "Right up to here." He'd made a gesture at his neck and Teresa had screamed into the shocked silence, "Daddy—Daddy, don't leave us!" But he hadn't even heard her and so she'd flung herself at her mother, burying her face against the soft body. Her father didn't love her. Then her mother must.

She'd worked very hard at it during the following months, burrowing like a little worm into the soft flesh of her mother's life, supporting, caring, consoling, until Mrs. Sweetman's friends cried: "What *would* you do without Teresa? She's a treasure—an angel—a marvel." Teresa would feel her mother's hand on her head, her arm round her shoulders, her soft lips on her cheek, and cast down her eyes modestly. If love must be earned, then she was prepared to work any overtime needed.

The uncles did not seem so much in evidence. They came to the house, of course, but they no longer lingered. It was as if, deserted, her mother had become taboo, and Teresa couldn't quite understand it.

On Saturdays, her father called to take her out. At first, she'd been angry and cold and rather rude, but when she saw that he actually didn't care, she stopped and began to enjoy herself. He took her to nice places she'd never been to before, like the zoo and the theater and Madame Tussaud's, and fed her rich, delicious food that horrified her mother.

"That meal would have fed a *dozen* children in Africa!" she cried, mortified. "It's *immoral*!" Teresa didn't care. If they were that starving, then prawn cocktails and knickerbocker glories would make them sick anyway and the food would be wasted. However, after that she didn't tell her mother what they ate or even what they did. Certainly not when her father took her to meet Miss Knight.

She'd imagined the Jezebel who'd stolen her father away—for that's the way her mother put it. She'd thought she'd be like the painting in her Bible, a plump, fleshy lady, with huge black-ringed eyes and those floaty clothes that revealed more than Teresa thought they ought. But Myra Knight was a neat lady in tailored skirts and sensible blouses, who smiled a lot and clucked and cosseted Teresa's father, who seemed well pleased with the whole business. Her flat was kept just so and there wasn't a curry puff or a grain of rice to be seen.

It had seemed to Teresa, in her innocence, that this new pattern of life was going to be very much more pleasant than the last.

The sale of the London house was as appalling a shock as her father's desertion. For her mother, too.

"I've lost everything! He's taken everything from me!" she'd cried wildly. "Husband, home, my life—"

Teresa had wept, too. "But you've got me!"

"Yes, yes—" Mrs. Sweetman had barely interrupted her lament. "Oh, the humiliation! What have I ever done to him? To think he breathes the very air I do!"

Presumably, Teresa thought miserably, it was the air which made her mother move to Wiltshire. And perhaps the same desire to hide that had often sent Teresa under her pretty duvet to escape.

But that first night in the cottage, lying in the chill little room and listening to the horrid scrabbling in the attic above, she was convinced that she would never be happy again.

Which only went to show that the approach to happiness goes through some strange country. Because those weeks that followed were to be the happiest Teresa had ever known. Amanda Sweetman, deprived of home, husband, friends, and charities, engorged her daughter totally. She took her to the village school across the meadows and was there when Teresa came out. They went for long, exploring walks and watched the baby mallard, little tortoiseshell dumplings skimming the shallow chalk stream. They cooked together, they read together, they acquired a brown-and-white rabbit with a bad leg and called him Ziggy. They learned to plant vegetables, wondering at the miracle that would transform these sharp brown seeds into succulent foods. And in the weekends they visited the ancient places of Wiltshire.

Old Mrs. Unwin, who lived with five cats in the brick cottage opposite their gate, said indulgently, "You're a new child, Teresa! Such a bonny girl—no pinched white cheeks *now*. I declare you've grown an inch already! It's this fine Wiltshire air, I'll be bound."

But Teresa knew otherwise. Teresa knew it was love.

"You're my *best friend*," Amanda Sweetman whispered often, her cheek pressed against her daughter's silky head. "What would I do without you?"

Teresa, snuggling against her mother's soft body like a little blonde cat, would purr with happiness. And if, on occasion, she would see a strange, hungry look come over her mother's face—a curious,

starved expression in her eyes—then, horribly frightened, she'd set to with all her might to drive it away. Like a court jester, she entertained her queen to make her happy again—and herself indispensable.

In London, Mr. Sweetman returned each evening to the ordered bliss of his delightful new home—to his perfectly mixed martini, his delicious dinner, and the undivided attention of his adoring new wife.

On three occasions he had driven to Wiltshire to see his daughter, but they had been, on the whole, unsuccessful visits. Teresa had been polite but dutiful, giving him the distinct impression he was unwanted. *De trop*. That her life with her mother was all she desired. So finally, with presents and protestations that he would come again soon, he had returned thankfully to London. And in a little while Teresa's photograph on the desk and the monthly deficit in his bank balance were all that reminded him that he had a daughter at all.

One week before her tenth birthday, her mother was not at the school gate. Teresa was only mildly surprised. It had happened a few times before and they would meet in Long Meadow in a flurry of laughs and hugs and explanations.

But that warm day, the meadow lay empty, a soft green coverlet over the humpy brown body of the earth. Teresa knew what those humps were. Mrs. Unwin had told her.

"Old cottages, my dear. Fell down when I were a child. Ramshackle old places. Farmer Baden, he never spent a farthing on 'em. Disgrace, they were."

Mrs. Sweetman thought it was creepy, but Teresa liked them. Sometimes she'd tie a scarf about her head and run out into the field and walk the old grassy lane between the long-gone cottages, pretending she was selling pegs or lavender or matches or whatever children sold in the old days.

But now she hurried, stumbling in her haste, her shoulder bag of books banging against her hip, an awful premonition goading her on.

The sagging kitchen door was unlocked. Her tea was laid, ready, a piece of paper propped up against her mug.

Guess what? Someone from Oxfam phoned me—they want me to organize this area! They've heard all about me from London! Isn't it *exciting*? Dashed into Salisbury to talk things over. Be back as soon as I can! Mum. xxx

For three whole minutes Teresa stared down at the paper. Then, numbly, she went out into the garden, took Ziggy from his cage, and walked out to Long Meadow. At the entrance to where the third cottage would have been, she sat down on the doorstep mound and let him free. He hopped a few paces, his crippled leg dragging, then settled to eat. She clasped her arms very tightly round her knees to stop herself shaking and watched him. He wouldn't run away. He couldn't. He was as trapped as if he were still in his cage.

She closed her eyes, screwing them up tight. "I'll go back!" she whispered despairingly. "I'll go back to the olden days! It won't hurt then! It won't matter any more!" But when she opened her eyes again, there were no cottages, no chickens scrabbling in a dusty lane, no foraging goat—just Ziggy and the humpy green meadow.

When Mrs. Sweetman came flying into the cottage an hour later, there was a glow, an incandescence about her that Teresa recognized with a sickening plunge of her heart.

"*Darling!* You haven't had your tea!" Leaflets, envelopes, and files tumbled onto the table and Teresa said stonily,

"I wasn't hungry."

"Silly girl." But it was said absently, as if her mother's mind was far away. "We must keep our strength up. There's going to be so much to *do!* We're going to be so busy!"

In fear and desperation, Teresa tried to hold her. Attempted to distract her with the pastimes which had seemed to delight them both. But the Starving Millions and the Homeless Poor moaned and keened about the cottage like the wind, pressing against the little leaded panes, scrabbling as the mice did at the doors and ceilings with their empty, pitiful hands. No matter how hard Teresa tried, how many diversions she frantically devised, she felt the cord that had bound her mother to her slipping through her panicking hands.

"Oh, do stop *pestering!*" Amanda Sweetman cried exasperatedly, cruelly, at last. "I'm *much* too busy to go for a walk! Go on your own—you don't need me all the time. Go and ask Janine."

But having spurned all local overtures of friendship in favor of her mother's companionship, Teresa now found herself spurned and isolated in turn. Little stuck-up London pariah in the country jungle.

"Then help *me!*" her mother complained. "You always used to help me!"

But Teresa couldn't. Helping her before hadn't made her mother

love her. Not above everything else. So there must be another way. If only she could find it. A way she could keep her forever and ever.

Mrs. Sweetman blossomed. And with the blossom came the uncles, like so many stubbly bees.

"Come and say hello!" "Come and say goodbye!" her mother would cajole, but Teresa would slink away to Long Meadow and wait until they were gone.

From the upstairs window of her chill little cottage, Mrs. Unwin watched disapprovingly. It wasn't right, she told herself as the cats rubbed against her thickly stockinged legs, for a child to be so much on her own. All that bobbing and curtseying and talking as if there were real people out there. It wasn't healthy. She had a mind to tell the mother so, only she was always on the go these days. Not like when they first moved in. Mrs. Unwin had thought then that she'd have some nice neighbors, that the horrid little bubble of loneliness Mr. Unwin had left her to endure would burst into a flurry of cups of tea and chats and nice drives to Salisbury. But it hadn't worked out that way. If she weren't so sorry for the child, she'd have had nothing to do with them at all.

Teresa, out in Long Meadow, knew Mrs. Unwin was watching. But Mrs. Unwin spent a great deal of time looking out of her windows. Or feeding the bulging cats huge mounds of food that lay congealing in stained saucers about the kitchen floor. Or eating toffees from the tins she secreted, squirrellike, in every room. Teresa knew, because when her mother had to stay out late Mrs. Unwin let her sleep in her cottage. Teresa hated it—the stupid ornaments and the thin, unlined curtains, the soppy picture of Jesus looking up to Heaven entitled *Your Father Loves You*. Teresa knew it was a lie. It was a dead place, a cold place, stained with the faint acrid smell of the cats.

One wet morning, a week after the beginning of the summer holidays, Mrs. Sweetman announced that Teresa was to go to boarding school. It was Daddy's idea, it would be super fun, she'd have lots of chums, just like she, Amanda, had had at school. But Teresa, watching how her mother shuffled her eyes, knew, betrayed, that it had been her mother's idea, not her father's—knew, too, that however much she might argue there'd be no change of plan.

She began to shake. Like black-skinned Goldilocks, they would move in when she was away, the Starving Poor would eat her food,

the Homeless Millions sleep in her bed. They would dispossess her, there'd be no room left for her—no room at all!

Shoving back her chair on the cracked lino, she ran so fast out to Long Meadow that the rooks rose like vast black butterflies, before settling once more to peck amongst the damp mole hills.

"What shall I do?" she wept into the rain. "What shall I *do*?"

And suddenly, so clearly and precisely that someone might actually have told her, she knew exactly what it was that she must do.

When she went back to the cottage, her mother exclaimed, with the anger of guilt: "You stupid girl, you'll catch your death standing out there in the rain!"

But Teresa only looked at her, serenely. "I'm not wet, you know. I didn't get wet at all."

And she wasn't. Her pink shirt was as dry as when she had put it on that morning. As if, Mrs. Sweetman thought uneasily, she had been sheltering somewhere.

Teresa didn't go to Long Meadow again. In the days that followed, she stayed obediently in the cottage, putting things in envelopes and copying lists, and when her mother said she'd have to sleep across the lane that night because there was a meeting, Teresa merely nodded and went on knitting.

Mrs. Unwin was watching television when Teresa said, politely, "I'm going to say goodnight to Ziggy."

Mrs. Unwin, rocking to the vicarious excitement of winning a holiday for two in Marbella, just nodded. If the child wanted to cosset that maimed creature, then she must. To Mrs. Unwin, it would have been far better in the pot.

Teresa ran across the lane, the kitchen key hard and cold against her hot palm, her heart bumping against her ribs like her satchel did against her back. She locked the door behind her. The tea things were unwashed, still beside the sink, the sweet essence of baked beans mingling with the sooty, coaly smell from the old Rayburne.

It was all so easy. That was what amazed her. It was all done in fifteen minutes and Mrs. Unwin hardly looked away from the sparkling screen when she came back into the cottage.

"All right then?" She picked another toffee from the tin beside her with the delicacy of an elephant lifting a bun with its trunk.

Teresa nodded, the knot of excitement in her tummy drawing tight as tight. "I shall go to bed now," she said, trying not to let her voice

tremble on the tightrope of anticipation. "Goodnight, Mrs. Unwin." And content in the sure knowledge that tomorrow her mother would be hers forever, she curled up like a little mouse under the pretty duvet and went straight to sleep.

When, next morning, she opened her eyes and saw her father instead of the picture of Jesus, she thought for a moment she was still asleep.

Mr. Sweetman's normally pale face was even paler. He had horrid black circles under his blue eyes and his mouth was making little twitching motions.

"Darling." Hushed-voiced, he came to sit, like a visitor to the sick bed, and took her hand. "You must be brave. There's been an accident."

Perhaps if Mr. Sweetman had been calmer, he'd have noted a curious expression, almost of satisfaction, in his daughter's blue eyes.

"Oh yes?" Teresa smiled up at him confidently. "Is Mummy in hospital, then?"

Her father's hand tightened and he blurted out with the insensitivity of shock, "Not really. You see, she had an accident in your kitchen— She—she's dead, Teresa, she was killed."

And Teresa, bolt upright, screamed, "But she wasn't meant to die! She was only meant to be hurt!"

It was only later that her father remembered the remark. When they found the freshly torn lino, the ancient, wooden well-lid in the cupboard under the stairs, the table pulled aside to make an obvious passageway.

"But *why*, Teresa? *Why* did you want to hurt your mother?" They ringed her—her father, Miss Knight (who was now Mrs. Sweetman), the police lady and the policeman—eyes like encircling campfires of apprehension and bewilderment.

And Teresa mumbled, because nothing mattered any more, it had all gone terribly, terribly wrong: "If she hurt herself, she'd have to stay with me. Like Ziggy. I'd look after her and she'd have to love me then."

Their eyes flickered. "But she *did* love you, darling. You know she did."

Teresa stared unseeingly at her father. "No, she didn't. Not like she loved the Starving Poor."

"How did you know about the well?"

"Mrs. Offer told me."

"Mrs. Unwin, you mean?"

"No, Mrs. Offer. She said it wasn't deep."

"But who's Mrs. Offer? We don't know any Mrs. Offer."

"She said it wasn't deep. She *promised* it wasn't deep 'cause they didn't use it any more, they'd dug a new one outside." They'd let her have Ziggy, let her have him on her knee, and she stroked the soft curved back intently.

"You mean Mrs. Unwin told you?"

"No. Mrs. Offer."

Humor her, then. Craftily.

"And where does Mrs. Offer live, dear?"

She led them—her father, Miss Knight (who was now Mrs. Sweetman), the police lady and the policeman, out into Long Meadow. "There." She pointed to the grassy hump. "She lives there."

It was the police lady who, fancying herself as a bit of a sleuth and a psychologist to boot, suggested the County Records Office and who indeed found the name in the 1851 census roll herself. *Female rag gatherer living at a cottage in the hamlet of Fifeton.*

No other Offers after that in any record anywhere in the parish.

Teresa had made it up, they insisted, trying to reassure themselves. She must have heard the name somewhere. Old Mrs. Unwin probably, though she denied it stoutly and hysterically. Everyone knew that wells were part and parcel of those old kitchens. Odd, though, that an eleven-year-old girl should know quite so exactly where it was. Certainly when neither the house agent nor the last owners professed any knowledge of it at all.

"Look after Ziggy for me, won't you?" Teresa said gravely before she got into her father's car, and Mrs. Unwin nodded so hard that two hairpins fell onto the grass. Oh, yes, she'd take care of that rabbit as if it were her own child. Because if she didn't, who knew what the girl might do? Even if she was going to live in London.

In the back seat, Teresa snuggled up to Myra Knight, who she must now learn to call Mother, leaning her small, silky blonde head against the firm shoulder.

"You will love me, won't you?" she pleaded. "You promise to love me?"

And for one terrible, shameful moment, the nice Myra Sweetman was reminded of a parasite that, having lost one host, must fasten

itself to another. In the driving mirror, her eyes met those of the man she had married so eagerly those few months ago, and she knew that the fleeting fear in his was reflected in her own. And if her voice was edged with a despair for a charming, idyllic way of life that was slipping away, who was to blame her?

"Of course, darling! Of course we shall love you! I promise!"

Teresa sighed and closed her eyes. That would be lovely. There'd be love and scones and chocolate cake and visits to the zoo and not one Starving Million anywhere. Anywhere at all.



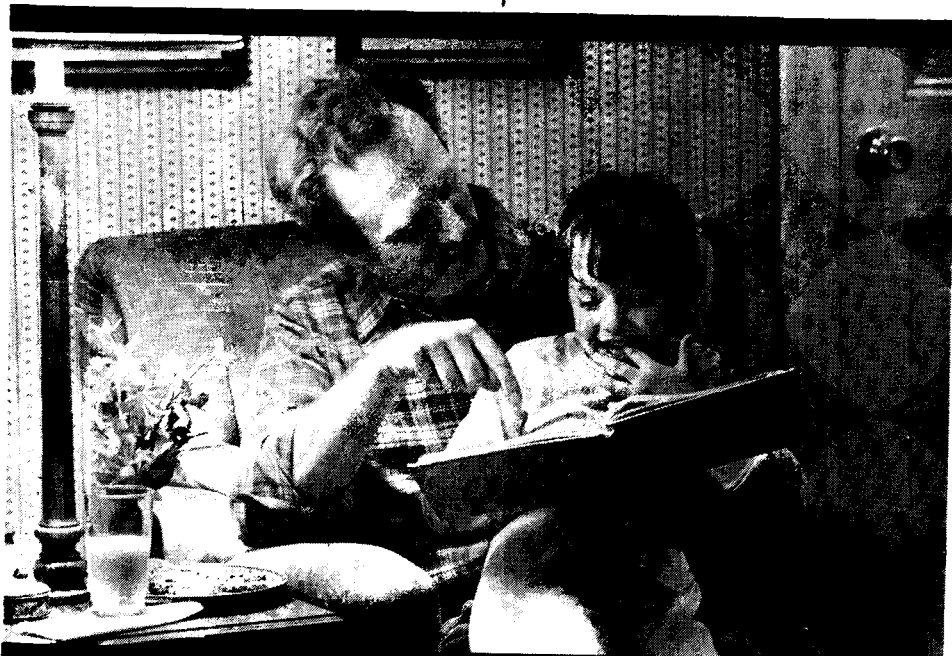
DETECTIVERSE

221B

by *PHYLLIS WHITE*

My dear Holmes, I sincerely repent
Being late with my share of the rent.
From the fruits of my toil
A fellow named Doyle
Has been dunning me for ten percent.

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a **NEW** Griswold story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

The trouble with dying messages, Griswold's friend said, is that it's hard to hear them and the dying mind doesn't make much sense . . .

THE COMMON NAME

by **ISAAC ASIMOV**

Jennings sounded a little petulant that night at the Union Club, considering the occasion. After all, he was announcing a new grandson. "The trouble is my daughter intends to name him David, over my discreet protests," Jennings said.

"What do you have against 'David'?" I asked.

"Too common. You get lost in the shuffle. All the Johns, Joes, Bills, Franks— Where is there a little invention, a little novelty, for heaven's sake?"

"What did you want him called?" asked Baranov. "Gamaliel? Jahawarlal? Give a kid a very unusual name and he'll be scapegoated by all the other kids, and probably seek refuge in a nickname, or be given one. Do you want him called Stinky?"

I said, "It seems to me that people want common names. Every redhead is nicknamed Red, every fellow with the last name Rhodes is promptly nicknamed Dusty."

Jennings said to me, "How about your name? I attribute all your literary success entirely to the fact that your name is out of the common and is therefore noticed and remembered."

I would have answered at indignant length, but it was at this point that Griswold, who had been napping in his large winged chair, gave his walrus imitation with a loud "Harumph!" and lowered the level of his drink by a quarter inch or so . . .

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I can cite you a case [said Griswold] where a common name gave the Department an enormous headache. I knew nothing about it at the time, since I was in the outer darkness and no one consulted me—this being their idiotic policy.

However, a number of years afterward I was reminiscing with an old friend from the Department—after he had retired, so that it was safe for him to make contact with me. The conversation got around to death-bed puzzles—the final remark of a dying man that is supposed to offer a clue to something or other.

My friend said, "The trouble is that it's hard to hear them and the dying mind doesn't make such sense. I've rarely heard of an actual death-bed puzzle in real life, and having one make useful sense is even rarer in my opinion. I remember a case in which we spent a great deal of time on one word gasped out by a dying agent, and it all came to nothing."

"Really?" I said, "When was this?"

"It was back in the Sixties. You weren't involved. God, the Chief hated you. If you had done him the favor of stepping out of line in some actionable way, he'd have had you suspended by a thumb and big toe in no time."

"Never mind that. The Chief is dead and has gone to his fiery reward. What's this death-bed puzzle you're talking about?"

"Well, we were troubled by the suspicion that we had a double agent among ourselves—"

"When were you ever not troubled by that suspicion?" I asked him.

"This time it was serious. We really had unaccountable leaks, and the Chief was wild. He put one of our best men on the matter, someone entirely above suspicion. Maybe you remember him—Dan Carmody."

I nodded. "It rings a bell. We were never actually friends."

"Presumably, he got the information we needed, but he never passed it along to us. He couldn't. He was killed by a knife-thrust in a dark doorway and the case was never solved. We always assumed the double-agent got to him before he got to us. An ambulance picked him up but he died en route to the hospital. The paramed at his side in the ambulance said he came to only once, gasped out, 'Harry,' and died."

"Interesting," I said. "But such a last word need have nothing to do with his investigation. Maybe it was the name of an old friend. Or maybe he owned a sled in childhood he called Harry. Or maybe

what he really said was 'hurry.' Or maybe he said something altogether different and the paramed just imagined 'Harry.' In fact, he might just have groaned or sighed and the paramed supplied the word. Actually, old friend, you had just about nothing to go on."

"I know," he said. "The trouble is, however, that we had *two* agents named Harry in our group, so the fact that Carmody was reported to have said 'Harry' as he died stirred us up a bit."

"Two Harrys?" I loved it. "Rather an embarrassment of riches. One Harry would have been much more convenient."

"Much," he said. "Not that either was a hopeful case—they both seemed arrows of the straightest sort."

"That doesn't mean a thing. A double agent would go out of his way to seem a straight arrow. Being obviously above suspicion is very suspicious, actually."

"Sure. We understood that. We investigated them both. It was peculiar. Considering that they were not related in any way and had never met each other before they had both joined the Department, they were remarkably similar. Both had French last names, for instance. One was Harry Jardiniere, pronounced Jardineer, and the other was Harry Beauchamp, pronounced Beecham."

I said, "A pity Carmody couldn't get out even part of the last name."

"The last name wouldn't play a role. Except in official signatures it never came up. Harry Jardiniere was a flaming redhead and Harry Beauchamp was black-haired—they were called Red Harry and Black Harry by everyone in the Department. It's a pity Carmody couldn't get out the Red or the Black."

I said, "Are they both really Harry, or is one or both short for Harold or Henry?"

"An interesting point, Griswold. Red Harry was really Harry by his birth certificate—like Harry Truman, you know. Black Harry was born Harold."

"Does that eliminate Black Harry?"

"No, the Harold was never used except on official signatures. I doubt that Carmody would ever have heard of him by any name other than Black Harry."

"So you investigated both of them."

"Yes, in every way. They were close friends and we didn't neglect the possibility that they were *both* playing double agent. We reasoned that if one of them was recruited, or fell into it ideologically, he would do his best to recruit the other. In that case, either the

other *would* be recruited or would report the equivocal behavior of the first."

"But you found nothing, I take it?"

"As nearly as we could make out, both were above reproach. Neither in any way implicated the other and there was no sign whatever of collusion."

"Still, there must be some significant difference between the two. Perhaps one was in debt and needed money. Or perhaps one had a wife and family and needed more money for that reason. Or perhaps one had a suspiciously high life-style, or a record of espousing causes that the Chief would consider dubious."

"Nothing of the sort. Both were single. Both lived abstemiously. Neither was in debt. Neither had a dubious record of any kind."

"Surely they weren't anchorites? Is it possible that one was a homosexual and vulnerable to blackmail? Or was one being hounded by an importunate girl friend?"

"Something of the sort *does* come up, but no. They both dated on occasion. —The Chief, you may remember, tended to discourage an obvious or an active sexual life as being unfitting for agents."

"Yes," I said. "His own passions were betting on the horses and a deep love affair with himself, with the two not necessarily in that order."

"But agents did date, just the same."

"Bravo. They all had the courage of lions."

"And that includes both of our Harrys. They both seemed to like girls, though they kept all such relations tepid."

"They had the courage of cautious lions."

"The nearest they came to being serious was that one had a fairly long-term girl friend, and when the relationship came to an end the other picked her up."

I sat up. "The same girl friend?"

"Yes."

"What was her name?"

"Edith Bond, as I recall. Why? Don't tell me you once had a girl friend who told you she'd gone about with two agents besides you." He laughed.

I said, "No, nothing like that. I never heard of the woman. Which Harry dated her first?"

"I'm not sure I remember. Does that make a difference?"

"Of course it does. The first one might have felt betrayed. He

might, therefore, seek revenge. Revenge takes odd twists sometimes—he might have felt it was a case of ‘betrayal for betrayal.’”

“I’ve never heard of that as a motive for treason. I *think* it was Black Harry that had her first, and Red Harry afterward, but it didn’t mean anything. The friendship was never disturbed by it. As nearly as we could make out, Black Harry was tired of the woman and was grateful that Red Harry took her off his hands. As for Red Harry, he seemed grateful that Black Harry didn’t mind. There was no trace of jealousy or annoyance over it.”

“Did you interview this Edith Bond?”

“Of course we did. Not a very bright woman, but—curvaceous. Somehow one got the idea that she was interested in sex and raised no difficulties if a man were interested. She didn’t seem at all bashful over having gone out with each of two friends and rather implied that, as far as she was concerned, she was ready for either. They were both ‘good skates,’ according to her—that was the expression she used—and bashful. She had taught them a lot, she said.”

“Yes, yes,” I said rather impatiently, “but did you inquire of Edith as to whether either Harry ever behaved in some peculiar fashion that might have significance in connection with double agenthood?”

“Yes, indeed—most circumspectly but in detail. What we could get out of her, we did. Unfortunately, there was nothing in anything she told us that could point to one Harry or the other—or, for that matter, to both. A shallow person, you see.”

“So you got nowhere.”

“Nowhere.”

“Where are the two Harrys now?”

“They both got out of the Department not long after all this. We rather encouraged that. Even though we had nothing on either of them, there is a certain uneasiness at the existence of suspicion, however unfounded. It was felt safer to have them away from anything sensitive.”

“Yes, I know the reasoning. And has either of them done anything since retirement that would make it seem as though he had been a double agent?”

“Not at all. Straight arrows they were, and straight arrows they still are. Black Harry is an executive in a bank in San Francisco. Red Harry has inherited money and lives on an estate in Connecticut.”

“*Inherited money?*”

"Perfectly legitimate, Griswold. We examined that possibility most carefully."

"Has either married?"

"Both, and they're still married. Black Harry has a son and Red Harry was two daughters."

"Which one of them married the woman—Edith Bond?"

"Neither one. Edith married someone with no connection with the government—a travel agent, as I recall. She died two years ago of cancer."

"So you had to abandon the dying word of Carmody as having no significance?"

"Well, no significance that we could work out."

"And no one ever consulted me."

"It would have been as much as our life was worth to do so."

"Too bad," I said, "because I know which Harry it was."

"What?"

"At this late date," I said, "it would be impossible to prove. Still, if you're curious—"

"Certainly, I'm curious. I doubt that you have anything, really, but I'm curious."

So I told him and he turned about three shades of green—for, of course, he could see that I was correct, and I hope he was well aware of the stupidity of the Chief, who allowed personal spite to come ahead of breaking an important case of espionage. There's no way of telling how much harm he did the nation in just that one instance.

Griswold had finished his story with the same air of smug self-satisfaction he usually exhibited in such cases.

I said, "Are you trying to tell us that on the basis of what you've told us, you can tell whether it was Red Harry or Black Harry that was the double agent? I don't believe it."

"Nor do I!" said Jennings promptly.

"I don't see how it would be possible to make any distinction," said Baranov doubtfully.

Griswold said, "I'm not surprised you all fall short. You think there are only two Harrys involved."

"There *are* only two Harrys involved," I said savagely.

"Really? Who is the most famous spy in history?"

"Mata Hari," said Jennings at once.

"Well," said Griswold. "You, at least, are not a total idiot. Carmody said a word that sounded like 'Harry,' but he didn't spell it, did he?"

The historical Mata Hari, it was alleged, got military information from her lovers—she sought out those with information. Edith Bond may have done the same, choosing the Harrys as lovers for that reason. Naturally, she would make herself sound like a shallow innocent on questioning. What would you expect her to do? As for poor Carmody, he, at the point of death, couldn't remember Edith's name, but he knew that she had played the role of Mata Hari and he remembered, even at the point of death, *that* name."

“Q”

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

This is the grave of "Con" McClellan
Who was shot to death by a fellow felon.
But under this slab of graveyard stone
There lies no vestige of flesh or bone
Because, before McClellan died,
He'd left instructions for his bride;
To wit: he wanted a quick cremation
(Since he'd be, by then, beyond sensation)
And when she was sure he was done to a turn,
She should gather his ashes into an urn,
Charter an airplane and take a flight,
Bearing the ashes at dead of night,
And scatter the ashes, a memorial haze,
Where he'd idled away fully half his days,
And let them slowly descend to earth
Over Joliet, Sing Sing, and Leavenworth.

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A NEW short story by

BRENDAN DuBOIS

"Whose car is it?" Cooney asked.

Benson put all the photos back into the envelope. "Like you said, it don't matter. What does matter are the pictures."

A dark story about repossession and a nagging debt by one of our youngest and best contributors . . .

A BAD DEBT

by BRENDAN DuBOIS

Inside the Bel-Aire diner the air was thick with cigarette smoke and the sound of dishes being slapped down by pink-uniformed waitresses. Benson walked up the center aisle, his leather jacket unzipped and a brown envelope in his hand. There. Just as he was told. Cooney was taking up an entire booth by himself—always the fifth one in—and the table was littered with dirty dishes and a wide cardboard folder. Cooney looked to be in his early thirties and he easily weighed over two hundred pounds. He wore a black T-shirt that said RILA CONCRETE underneath an open denim vest, and his beard was thick and black. He had a pen in one hand and a cigarette in another, and at his elbow the cardboard folder spewed open papers across the tabletop. It was three o'clock in the morning.

When Benson slid in across from Cooney, the man looked up, a puzzled look on his face, and the hand with the pen dropped down to his side. Benson knew it was now wrapped around a leather sap. He knew a lot about Cooney.

"Morning," Benson said, letting the envelope lay flat on the greasy table. "You're Cooney, aren't you? The repo man? My name's Benson."

"That's right," Cooney said. "You got a problem, Mister? I tow

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your car? Then take it up with your finance company, don't bug me. You deadbeats are all alike. Why don't you pay your bills? Us working people gotta keep you afloat?"

"I didn't say you took my car. You didn't."

"Oh." The hand re-emerged from under the counter. "Sorry about that. You gotta be careful, with what I do. A lot of people get ripped and some of them try to even things up."

"They ever succeed?"

Cooney smiled and there were some back teeth missing. "Not yet."

"Good. Cooney, I want to hire you."

"You do, hunh? Is your car broke down? If it is, you gotta call a commercial wrecker."

A waitress came by, her white-blond hair held up with a bandana and her pink uniform soiled with sweat and grease. She poured some coffee into Cooney's mug and turned to Benson. He waved her away. Coffee kept him awake and when he was done here he'd sleep for a while. He was behind on sleep. He had been busy.

"No, my car's fine," he said. "I want to hire you for a repossession."

Cooney emptied his coffee cup with a long swallow and brushed away some crumbs from his T-shirt. "A repo? My contract says I only do repos for Universal Retrieval, but I'd be interested in what you was offering. For comparison, of course."

Benson leaned over the table. "I think you'd do it for free."

"Free?" The hand went under the table again. "Free? Thomas Cooney never did a free thing in his life for anybody, Mister, and I'm not about to start now. You want a repo, you pay more than Universal and you pay up front, cash. Free, forget it."

Benson undid the envelope clasp, reached in, and took out three eight-by-ten black-and-white glossies. He spread them across the table like he was dealing out a card hand and almost tingled with joy as he watched Cooney slowly reach down and pick up each picture in turn.

"Recognize them?" he asked, and Cooney said nothing, looking at the pictures with his jaw slack and his mouth open. The three photos showed a wrecker backed up to a car and Cooney by the tow gear, chains in his hands. The pictures were fuzzy and dark-toned.

"They're blurry," Cooney said, letting them fall from his hands.

"Taken at night with a special film. Can't be helped."

"So what. They're pics of me repossessing cars, that's what I do for a living."

"Oh, that's right, but you and I know what's behind those three

cars, Cooney. They were never assigned by any finance company for repossession. The owners were current with their payments and all three of these cars were reported stolen. And here we have pictures of you getting ready to tow them away. Where did you take them, Cooney?"

"It don't matter."

Benson gathered up the pictures, placed them in a pile. "You took all three to Dave's Garage, corner of Twelfth and Lowell. Dave's Garage is chop-shop and in a day or two those three cars were chopped up into spare parts and sent up and down the coast. What's the market in stolen cars now, Cooney? Fifty a pop? Seventy-five?"

Cooney's face was turning red and he was licking his lips. "Listen, I don't know who the hell you are but I'll tell you this, I got paperwork on those three cars, I was told to pick 'em up and deliver 'em to Dave's. What happened after that is none of my business. Or yours."

Benson reached into his back pocket, pulled out a thin leather wallet, and flipped it open, displaying the gold shield inside.

"Want to rephrase that last sentence? About who's business is what?"

"Cop," Cooney breathed. "You're a goddamn cop."

"Detective first-class, Cooney, and let's talk again about your fee. I want a car repossessed and I want you to do it. Do it quiet, with no fuss, and these pictures get put away and you don't get charged with anything. Any problems, the next time I see you, your butt gets busted."

Cooney looked around the diner, as if he was looking for help. "Why does a cop want a repo?"

"My own reasons. Let's say it's a bad debt that has to be settled. I got you on black and white, Cooney, on film and on paper. It took me a lot of time to track you down and this is what you're going to do."

He took another photo from the envelope. It was a three-quarters shot of a luxury car, a Cadillac. On its rear bumper was a Connecticut license plate.

"This car is parked every Friday night in a guarded lot next to the Colonnades Restaurant on Commerce Street. Tomorrow night you and I are going there. You're going to have all the necessary paperwork, the writs and what have you, and we're going to repossess that car. You'll keep it at a storage lot for an hour and then you'll bring it back to the restaurant and apologize to the owner for a screw-up. You'll tell him you had the wrong paperwork, the wrong

license plate, the wrong color, I don't care what, but you're going to get the car and bring it back in an hour."

"Whose car is it?"

Benson put all the photos back into the envelope. "Like you said, it don't matter. What does matter are the pictures."

Cooney sat still, his fleshy, dirty hands out flat on the table. The diner seemed noisy to Benson. There was the constant low murmur of people talking, the clatter of dishes, the steady hum of a kitchen fan, and a country-music tune wailing from a jukebox at the far end. He had an odd feeling that he was inside some exhibit, some display, because he knew that if he traveled a thousand miles west he would come across a similar diner, peopled by truck drivers with the same tense and drawn faces, the waitresses with the same elaborate hair-styles and the tattoos of flowers on their wrists.

"You know how much I get for a repossession?" Cooney asked. "Fifty bucks a whack. The monthly payment for my wrecker's more than five hundred or so a month, and I'm not including food and rent. And I'm lucky to get two or three good repos a week. A lot of times I get a car assigned for a repo, it takes me weeks to track down the deadbeat and I find out they've moved to Maine or something. Let me tell you, deadbeats don't leave their car in the driveway with the keys in 'em." He toyed with his spoon for a moment and tossed it into his empty coffee cup, where it made a quick clatter.

"So I had to make some arrangements, steal a few cars. I had bills to pay. So I give people entertainment, stories to tell their friends about their cars getting stolen. I help the insurance companies. I got seventy-five bucks for every car I brought in to Dave's. Big deal."

"Big or not, do we have a deal?"

Cooney pointed to the envelope. "For this repo, I have to get something."

"Go ahead."

"The pics," he said. "For going with you, I want the prints and negatives. I can't have you putting them in some filing cabinet somewhere and having another cop dig them out next year and nailing me to the wall. I gotta have something."

Benson picked up the envelope. "All right, agreed. I'll be here tomorrow night at midnight. If you're not here, the next time I see you I'll have a warrant."

He got up from the table and maneuvered down the aisle, dodging a tray-laden waitress along the way. When he had reached the parking lot, he saw that Cooney was peering through the plate-glass

window at him. He ignored the man and kept on walking. He had some sleep to catch up on. It had been a very busy month, a month with a lot of obligations, all of them for Tony.

On the next night he wore the same clothes, the jeans, the engineer boots, the leather jacket—now zipped shut—and along with the detective's shield, handcuffs, and the .38 snubnose in an ankle holster, he carried a few other things, things he hoped to keep a secret. He walked across the Bel-Aire parking lot, his boots clicking on the pavement, his arm held tight against his side. His ribs ached a bit, where they were being pressed against.

Cooney's wrecker was dull-red, with an unlit amber strobe bar across the top of the cab. The tow equipment was dirty and greasy but it looked like it was well maintained. Benson gave a quick glance over the chains, levers, and cables at the rear of the truck. He had worked on a tow truck one summer while in high school. It was one of the reasons he had volunteered for this one.

Cooney was sitting inside the cab, one arm hanging outside the door. On the door it said JIMBO'S WRECKER SERVICE in yellow letters. The engine was rumbling softly and Benson slammed the door hard when he got inside.

"Who's Jimbo?" he asked.

Cooney shifted the truck into first and eased it out onto Wall Street. "Some deadbeat who owned it before I did. He couldn't keep up with the payments and you know what happened?"

"It got repossessed."

He snorted with laughter. "Yeah. Can you believe it? Repossessed. So I bought it off the finance company and let me tell you, those payments I make first and on time every month."

The cab's interior was filthy and Benson's feet rested on a mold-ering pile of fast-food wrappers, empty cans of beer, greasy wrenches and screwdrivers, and soggy, yellowed newspapers. Cooney had a cardboard coffee cup nestled in his lap, his paperwork in a folder next to him. The radio was tuned to a talk show. Benson sat still, his coat zipped, his arm against his side. On the radio the host was arguing with a caller who said the Air Force was hiding a crashed flying saucer at an air base in New Hampshire. The host said the caller was a moron. The caller replied by saying that the host was part of the conspiracy. He wished both of them would shut up.

Cooney drove the wrecker up an exit and then they were on the

expressway heading into the city. There was very little traffic and Benson looked at the speedometer.

"Slow it down," he said. "We're ten miles over the limit."

"Why? Don't you want to get there tonight?"

"Slow it down," he repeated. "I don't want any attention, any problems."

He looked at the speedometer out of the corner of his eye and saw the needle waver and drop.

The streetlights flew by at a one-two, one-two pace and he found it hard not to become hypnotized. The expressway was built on squat pillars and was elevated over most of the city, and as he looked out the window he saw that they were passing through rich neighborhoods, poor neighborhoods, industrial parks with darkened warehouses and silent factories, and gleaming office buildings, still lit and shiny, as if they were alive at all hours.

After another exit and ten more minutes of driving, they were on Commerce Street, heading south. Benson sat up straight in the seat, eyeing the buildings as they went by.

"There it is," he said. "On the corner. Take us around the block for a look-see."

The Colonnades was a three-storey brick building, the first storey fronted by long, delicate-looking stone pillars. The restaurant's name was spelled out in glowing pink neon and next to the building was a fenced-in parking lot filled with cars. There was a gate to the lot and a small gatehouse. Cooney whistled as he turned the wrecker around the corner and then swung the wrecker over to the sidewalk and shut off the engine. The silence seemed very loud.

We're being set up, Benson thought, and he moved his leg to free up the ankle holster.

"Surprise," Cooney said.

"What the hell's going on?" Benson said, looking for a backup for Cooney, but the sidewalks were empty. He was surprised his voice wasn't any louder.

"I'm telling you something, that's what, Detective. The fee's going up."

A shakedown. "It is? Why's that?"

Cooney shifted in his seat. "You didn't tell me a couple of things, Detective. I made some phonecalls this morning after you left. A repo man's gotta have his information. I called up a cousin of mine who works for the city and I found out where you work out of. You're

from something called the Organized Crime Strike Force. My cousin pulled out your job slip.

"And another thing. I had the license plate on this Caddy run through Motor Vehicles and it comes back registered to H.W.M., Inc., which is owned by Charlie Merwin. I guess Charlie Merwin goes hand in hand with your job, right?"

"Go on." No time to get tense. It was way past midnight. Pretty soon no more time for anything.

"So I want some bucks. I want every dollar you got in your wallet. And if I don't get it I'll drop you off here and talk to the newspapers tomorrow. I'll tell 'em that some cop pressured me to steal a car from a businessman. A big businessman in town whose only crime is to be accused of being in the mob. Use the pictures if you like. I don't steal Charlie Merwin's car without some cash."

Benson kept still, wondering if he could clip Cooney, dump him here, and go into the parking lot by himself, but he wasn't sure if he could handle the wrecker alone. He thought of reaching down to his ankle holster but instead he pulled out his wallet and emptied it, throwing the bills across the seat. Cooney scrambled after the money, counting it and stuffing the bills into his vest.

"Three hundred. Not bad for a cop. You on the take or what?"

"You got your fee, get going."

"We go, we go, don't worry," Cooney said, turning the key. "You feeling okay?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You're sort of hunched up a bit, like your side's hurting."

First the identification, then the money, and now this.

"My side hurts a bit. I dinged some ribs this morning."

"Oh."

Once around the block and they were on Commerce Street again. Traffic was still light and Cooney kept the speed low as they approached the parking area. It was well lit and the chain-link fence was topped by barbed wire. A sign by the gatehouse, red letters on white paint, said: COLONNADES PARKING ONLY—VIOLATORS WILL BE TOWED. NO TRESPASSING. He felt an odd sense of pressure, like he really wasn't there. Tony's payoff was coming up.

"Can you get us in?"

Cooney snorted. "Me? In a second. Watch, Detective. You're gonna learn something."

The short driveway into the lot was blocked by a mobile barricade

and Cooney stopped the wrecker next to the gatehouse. The attendant came out, a teenager dressed in a baggy blue uniform. He was chewing on a doughnut and had an open bottle of Coke in his other hand. His hair was cut to a crewcut and rock music roared from a radio inside the booth.

"Yeah?" the kid asked.

"How you doing," Cooney said, his arm resting on the open window. "I'm here to pick up the Caddy."

The kid stopped chewing. "What Caddy?"

Cooney turned to Benson. "Did you hear that?" He turned back to the attendant. "Listen, all I know is I gotta work order to pick up a Caddy in here. It's parked illegally or something."

"When did you get the call?"

"'Bout twenty minutes ago."

"I came on shift three hours ago. I don't know nothing about any Caddy getting towed."

"Jeez," Cooney muttered, rummaging through his papers. "Look. Here's a copy of my work order—" He handed the kid some papers.

The attendant looked through the papers, deftly pocketed something that had been clipped to the pile, and handed them back.

"Okay, but make it quick," he said, pushing a switch that opened the barricade. "I don't need the heat."

"In and out," Cooney said. He gunned the engine and they were in.

He swung the wrecker to the right and they drove past rows of cars. "How much was the bribe?"

"Twenty," Cooney said. "It should buy us twenty minutes."

The engine was throbbing with a deep sound that seemed to travel into Benson's head. He glanced up and down and there was Charlie Merwin's Caddy parked third from the end. He chewed on his lower lip for a moment. So little time to do it.

Cooney passed the Cadillac and put the wrecker into reverse, backing it up until the truck was almost to the front bumper of the car. He set the handbrake and throttle, and when he got out of the cab Benson followed him, stepping carefully to the ground. The night air felt cooler here and he looked up past the rows of cars to the soft lights of the restaurant. He imagined a warm interior, with gracious people in fine clothes sipping wine and eating food with strange names. He was suddenly very hungry.

He went to the rear of the wrecker, where Cooney was pulling on a pair of work gloves. He seemed to be moving in slow motion. What

was the problem? Benson looked behind the wrecker. No one was there. Just the car, its engine silent, its lights off. Time to get moving. "Here," he said, pulling a chain off the tow gear. "I'll give you a hand."

"Hey," Cooney protested, but Benson was on the ground by then. He was on his back, looking straight up. He couldn't see any stars. He unzipped his leather jacket to free himself up a bit and slid under the front fender of the Cadillac.

The chain was cold and greasy in his hands. It was dark under the car—he could only make out faint shapes—and as he went to work he made an effort to keep calm, trying to remember where everything went. He heard voices, a brief argument, and he kept working. Someone kicked at his feet. He ignored it, almost finished, and then another kick came, harder.

Done. He slid out, the chain in his hand.

Two men were standing with Cooney. One was looking at some papers and the other one, who had a moustache, was glaring down at Benson. They both wore suits and the one with the moustache had his coat pulled open so they could see his shoulder holster.

Benson got to his feet, his coat still unzipped. Cooney shrugged his shoulders. "They came just as I was getting the other chain out," he said.

The first man, who had silver hair that looked perfectly combed under the lights of the parking lot, looked up from the papers.

"Do you know whose car this is?" he asked.

Benson looked at Cooney and Cooney said, "Hey, Mister, I just repossess what I'm told. I get the paperwork and I take whatever's there."

The first man waved the papers at Cooney. "This is all wrong, numbnuts. The license plate is different and this is an 'eighty-five, not an 'eighty-two. You're lucky you didn't get out of the parking lot with this. You'd have made a lot of people mad. Get the hell out of here before something bad happens to you."

He handed the papers out to Cooney and dropped them just before Cooney grasped them. Cooney hunched over to pick them up, breathing heavily, and as the first man walked away he bumped into Cooney so that he fell. The second man stared at Benson, who stood there silently, the chain in his fist. "You heard the man," he said to Benson. "Get the hell out."

Benson looked at Cooney, grasping at the scattered papers on the ground. He took the chain and swung it and there was a crash-tinkle

as he smashed a parking light on the car. He went around and came up close to the second man, the chain still tight in his hand.

"Gee," Benson said. "Sorry about that. You can give us a call and we'll tell our insurance company."

The man opened his coat wider, exposing the butt of his pistol. "Go. Before you get in an accident."

On their way out of the lot, the attendant flashed them a bird but Benson didn't care. He was very tired. He hunched up on the seat, his coat open, his feet and ribs aching. The lights on the roadway seemed brighter and they hurt his eyes.

"Sorry it didn't go, Detective."

"Shut up," he said, wondering how long it would take them to get back to the diner. His car was parked a few blocks from the Bel-Aire and it could take some time before he was on the road.

"Just one thing," Cooney said, checking the traffic before getting back on the expressway. "Why Charlie Merwin?"

Should he talk or shouldn't he? What would be right? Benson thought for a moment, watching the bright red taillights of the cars wink at him as they passed by, and he decided to talk, though God knows he couldn't say anything about Tony.

"There's a lot of stuff going on out there, a lot of stuff Charlie Merwin's involved in. He and some other people are practically at war now. Bodies are popping up in dumpsters, in car trunks, and in the harbor. We know Merwin's behind it, but we haven't been able to get the evidence even though we've been gunning for him a long time. I did this on my own. He killed a friend of mine."

"A cop?"

"Yeah, a cop."

"So why the car?" Cooney asked.

"No more questions, no more answers." Benson folded his arms across his chest and closed his eyes. His ribs were feeling better.

Cooney spoke up. "Hey, I got it figured out."

"You do?"

"Yeah, I do. You guys were looking for evidence or something, right? So you wanted to steal his car for an hour so you could bug it, put in, whaddya call 'em, listening devices. And then I'd bring the car back, apologize for a screwed-up repo, and Charlie Merwin wouldn't think anything about it. And then you'd listen to everything he had to say for a month or two."

"You think too much."

At the Bel-Aire, the parking lot was full of tractor-trailer trucks and Cooney backed the wrecker into an empty space on the other side of the diner. They could hear the muted sound of the jukebox from inside the diner. Cooney gathered up his papers and Benson thought of going to his ankle holster but he thought, no, it would work out.

"Well, Detective, how about those pictures?"

"What about them? The car's back at the lot."

Cooney blinked at him. "C'mon, Benson, you said you'd give me the photos if I went with you! You didn't say anything about a successful repo. I went with you and I get those pictures—a deal's a deal!"

A part of him was almost beginning to like Cooney.

"Cooney, you're absolutely right. A deal is a deal." He reached into his coat and pulled out a folded envelope. "But before you get them, one question."

"Sure."

"How much did you get for tipping Merwin off?"

"Hunh?"

"C'mon yourself. We pulled into the lot and sixty seconds later two of Merwin's boys are all over us. You knew before we got there what I was up to and whose car we were after. I get the feeling you called Merwin's people and tipped them off. How much? Five hundred? A grand?"

Cooney laughed. "Detective, you're too paranoid. Now, do I get the pictures?"

"Here." Benson tossed them over. "I hope you choke on them."

"I won't, but they sure won't be going into my scrapbook anytime soon. Hey, Detective, no hard feelings, okay? I'm just doing my job, which is bringing in money for Thomas Cooney. I'm just sorry the repossession didn't go well."

"No, no hard feelings."

Cooney got out of the truck and ambled toward the diner. Benson kept his pace quick as he left the parking lot. He kept track of the minutes before he got to the car, noting the time, and along the way he made sure he wasn't followed.

The next day he was at a motel outside of the city. He had slept well and showered, and as he ate in the motel coffee shop, he had a loose feeling of being relaxed, as though he had finished a very long race. Later that morning he made a phonecall and talked to

his mother for some time before his father came on the line. His father was a retired police captain and he and his mother lived in Florida.

"How are you doing?" his father asked.

"Not bad. Is Mom next to you?"

"No, she's in the kitchen." There was a pause and the hiss-crackle of the long-distance line. His father cleared his throat and spoke again. "I saw the morning paper. You did well, your brother would be very proud of you."

"Thanks, Dad." He sat down on the bed, the phone cool in his hand.

"What are your plans now? You still have some vacation time left with the department, don't you?"

"Well," Benson said. "I'm checking out of here today and I'm thinking of heading south."

"Are we in for a visit?"

"You might be at that." He stared up at the cracked white plaster of the ceiling. "Dad, I'd better get going."

"All right, then."

He hung up, got up from the bed, and went to the writing table. The shield was there, along with the handcuffs and a newspaper. The shield and cuffs belonged to his brother Tony. He knew he should dump them but he was going to bring them to his parents. There wasn't much left to remember Tony by since they'd found him last month in the harbor. He shook his head in amazement at what he'd done. So many things to possibly screw it up and in the end it had all rested on some junior file clerk in the department not pulling his brother's personnel file after his death. Cooney had been close.

He unfolded the newspaper. The headline said MOB BOSS KILLED IN CAR BLAST. Below the headline was a picture of the Cadillac, twisted and mangled after a bomb had gone off.

Benson gathered his belongings and got ready to leave. Among other things last night, Cooney had been wrong when he said the repossession hadn't gone well. It had gone perfectly. The debt had been settled.

"Q"

a **NEW Simon Bognor** story by

TIM HEALD

"So you really think there is an elephant-polo tournament?" Simon asked, blowing yak rings toward the ceiling of the jungle lodge. There was a hole in the middle of it, through which smoke from the open fire could be seen to eddy. Bognor's cigarette smoke joined the main fume.

"I should say it's probable," Monica said. "Life being what it is, I think elephant polo is probably a fact of it."

Yes, elephant polo—for very high stakes, and very high humor—in Nepal, where Simon has been dispatched on a fact-finding mission for the Board of Trade to see whether the preservation of the endangered elephant might not have some commercial application in the U.K. . . .

**SIMON BOGNOR AND THE
SUDDEN DEATH**

by **TIM HEALD**

Twenty yak and two jungle teas," said Bognor, nonchalantly flicking flapjack crumbs from the collar of his khaki drill shirt. He did not normally smoke anything except small cigars but there didn't appear to be any small cigars in this part of Nepal so he had resorted to yaks instead. Yaks were stubby filtertips made in Janakpur. They claimed a Virginia tobacco content but Monica, Mrs. Bognor, said they smelt of yak dropping and Bognor was inclined to agree that they tasted of yak dropping, too. A jungle tea was hot and alcohol-based. Very stimulating.

The Bognors were surprised to be in Nepal, especially as recent

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government cuts had severely dented Bognor's entertainment allowance and restricted his travels to third-class British Rail. However, there was a new broom at the Board of Trade, a youngish Minister on the make who was keen on such trendy non-Thatcherite areas as ecology and the third world. He had also had a short service commission with the Brigade of Gurkhas and this had left him with an abiding affection for the kingdom of Nepal and a possibly exaggerated respect for the Indian elephant.

As an admittedly muddled consequence of this, Bognor had been dispatched on a fact-finding mission, liaising with Overseas Development, the World Wild Life Fund, and other such agencies to see whether the preservation of the endangered elephant might not have some commercial application in the U.K. At the moment, the Minister seemed to have nothing more far-fetched in mind than using elephants instead of Land Rovers at Safari Parks but there had been mutterings about a military application (vide Hannibal), and even talk of using the wretched beasts on the construction of the Channel Tunnel. In the bowels of the Board of Trade, where Special Investigator Simon Bognor had his office, there had been merriment and ribald laughter tinged with jealousy at Bognor's landing such a desirable freebie.

Meanwhile, Monica's ninety-two-year-old Aunt Winifred, the one in the nursing home at Frinton, had finally snuffed it, leaving her niece an unexpected seven and a half thousand. Monica had decided to spend some of this on a return ticket to Kathmandu.

Which is how, more or less, the two of them came to be sitting by an open fire in an isolated jungle lodge surrounded by wild tigers, rhinoceroses, leopards, elephants, and any number of things that went bump in the night and disturbed their sleep with alarming screams.

Bognor drew heavily on his yak.

"Do you think they're serious about the polo?" he asked his spouse, "or are they winding me up?"

Monica shrugged. "Speaking as one who is engaged on researching a pink paper on the potential application of *elephas maximus* by Her Majesty's government, I think you should tread warily when it comes to questions of seriousness," she said. "In other words, I can't see that your involvement with elephants is any more serious than that of some wally who wants to play polo on one."

Bognor thought about this for a moment.

"So you really think there is an elephant-polo tournament?" he

asked, blowing yak rings toward the ceiling. There was a hole in the middle of it, through which smoke from the open fire could be seen to eddy. Bognor's cigarette smoke joined the main fume.

"I should say it's probable," she said. "Life being what it is, I think elephant polo is probably a fact of it."

And, as so often happened, Bognor's wife was right.

The players began to arrive next morning. Some bumped in along the grass airstrip on the other side of the river. Others bumped along the dirt roads in jeeps and Land Rovers. Some were only here for the beer (or the Bloody Marys or the champagne); some for the companionship; and some for the publicity—attendance was a virtual guarantee of a little space in *The Tatler* or *Polo International*, or even a fraction of a second on TV.

A few—a very few—were here for the result. Six of the teams were in it for the fun—for the joy of taking part, for the playing not the winning, for the absurdity of it all. But two teams were in it for real. Or as near real as such an aberration would allow. One of these was composed of five maharajahs, although India had done away with titles such as "maharajah" so these five immensely rich and immensely privileged men usually masqueraded under relatively plebeian names. These, however, fooled nobody. All five were in their thirties. All five were fit and handsome and attended by wives and mistresses and servants of every description. They called themselves "All India" and they had even brought their own elephants.

They were determined to win.

This could not be said of the all-star celebrity team, sponsored by the "prestigious" champagne maker from Rheims, nor of the conservationist rock stars who paraded under the auspices of a Japanese car manufacturer, still less of the international rock-group who were making their own video of the event, or the galloping majors of Skinner's Horse.

But one other team was determined to win. They called themselves "The Assassins" and they had all made their money out of money—being "investment analysts" or "financial consultants" or "commodity brokers" or "something in the city." This did not, however, mean that they had fallen prey to the sins of the flesh. Physically as well as mentally, these were hard men. They were also truly international in the sense that they were traveling on American, British, Irish, Brazilian, and Swiss passports, and also in the sense that these passports gave no very real sense of their roots.

The Englishman, for instance, who claimed to be called Caspar

Carrington-Fortescue "divided his time" (a peculiarly chilling phrase, Bognor always thought) between Monte Carlo, Caracas, Santa Barbara, and Manila. It was also perfectly evident that the name was something he had thought up quite recently. He might, reckoned Bognor, have been born Lopez or Schumacher or Fegato, but definitely not Carrington-Fortescue. Bognor was not being snobish or even racist when he came to this conclusion, just realistic.

"Does it matter?" asked Monica, waving away a plume of yak smoke.

"Yes," replied Bognor. "It means he's bogus."

"In the long run," said Monica enigmatically, "we're all bogus."

Most of Bognor's working time was taken up in interviewing elephant experts. Some of these were distinguished professorial figures who controlled national parks and sanctuaries, others were the mahoots who actually drove the elephants. It was clear that these interviews were leading to one obvious conclusion, which was the one Bognor had drawn weeks ago in his office in Whitehall—namely, that the best place for Nepalese elephants was Nepal. Bognor's problem was the usual bureaucrat's puzzle of how to produce a report long and complex enough to justify his trip. This, after a while, was the main reason for the interviews.

The evening after the arrival of the polo players, he and Monica were sitting by the campfire when they were aware of a mild hubbub. After a while, Bognor, curious, wandered across to the bar, ordered two more jungle teas, and inquired of a major in Skinner's Horse with whom he had struck up an acquaintance, "What's up?"

"One of the serious polo chappies," said the major. "Gone missing."

"Missing?" This was surprising information. The camp was an island in the jungle and there was no way out except by elephant or Land Rover. Besides, it was seven or eight hours' drive to Kathmandu and there was nothing worth talking about between here and there. It wasn't the sort of place from which you might just nip down to the local for a pint of bitter.

"Name of Caspar Carrington-Fortescue," said the major, sniffing. "Seems to have done a bunk."

"How odd," said Bognor.

"Very," agreed the major. "Mind, I thought he had an odd look about him when I first saw him."

Just then, Danvers Smythe spotted Bognor and greeted him as if he had been searching for him high and low. Smythe was the genius

who had put together the elephant-polo concept. He owned the camp and a handful of others in remote and exotic parts of the world—he was a sort of Outward Bound Walt Disney.

"I'd like a word, Bognor," he said, sounding horribly like Bognor's boss, Parkinson. "We've got a bit of a crisis on our hands."

They retreated to a dim corner, where Smythe gingerly adjusted his Royal Artillery cravat.

"The fact of the matter is—" he began.

Bognor smiled knowingly. "That Caspar Carrington-Fortescue's done a bunk," he said.

Smythe winced. "How did you know that?" he asked.

Bognor shrugged. "We're trained to know things like that," he said lightly.

"Good man!" Bognor's host clapped him on the shoulder. "So you won't mind taking the case on?"

"What?"

"Someone has to investigate it. The local police chief has a single-figure IQ and no English. Kathmandu's not a lot better. You're a professional sleuth and what we need is just that—a qualified detection-wallah."

It was Bognor's turn to wince. "I'm a Board of Trade investigator," he protested, "not a—"

"Good egg," said Smythe. "You can have our best elephant and our best man, too."

"But—" said Bognor.

"You can go out first thing in the morning. Meanwhile, you'd better talk to his colleagues. I'll introduce you to Paul Fritters. He's the team captain. Swiss chap. Banker. Big interest in chocolate. You'll like him—he's a good man, Fritters." Smythe seemed relieved, as if he had solved something. He smiled. "Very good man indeed," he said.

Fritters was a lean, sallow forty-five-year-old with fish eyes and a scar between his left earlobe and his lip. He wore a blazer and grey-flannel trousers, both very expensively tailored. He also wore too many rather vulgar rings on his fingers, one of which—the index on the right hand—had its tip missing.

He remained silent as they shook hands, merely inclining his head a fraction.

"I'll leave you two to get on with it," said Smythe, retreating.

"Well," said Bognor, "what can you tell me?"

"Caspar is our best player," said the Swiss. "It is vital that he plays." Bognor glimpsed a gold tooth. Herr Fritters spoke with something approaching passion.

"What happened exactly?" Bognor wanted to know.

"That is what we want *you* to tell *us*."

"Quite," agreed Bognor mildly. "But I need some background. When was he last seen? How did he seem? Was he depressed? Is he in the habit of wandering off? Could anybody have wanted to kidnap him?"

"Kidnap him? Why do you say that?" Fritters seemed suddenly agitated.

"It's just that it's something we have to consider," said Bognor, "along with amnesia, depression, or just simply wandering off and getting lost."

"He may have been eaten."

"Perfectly possible."

Generally speaking, tigers preferred goat but they did sometimes mistake a man for a goat, although it seemed unlikely when the man was as obviously humanoid as Caspar Carrington-Fortescue.

"In Burma they used to execute criminals by having an elephant stand on the man's head," said Fritters. He looked very gloomy.

"I don't think he's been trodden on by an elephant," said Bognor, "but I can't be sure yet." He tried to sound brisk. "When was Carrington-Fortescue last seen?"

"After chukkas," said Fritters. "He came back to camp in the Land Rover, had a beer and some vegetable curry, then said he was going to his room to lie down."

"Room or tent?" asked Bognor crisply.

"Room. He was in the main building."

"I see." Bognor pulled a reporter's notebook from his pocket and wrote in it with a pencil. "Room number?" he asked.

"Fourteen."

"I see. And how long had you known Carrington-Fortescue?"

"About four years. Dublin Horse Show in 'eighty-one. I have a small stud in County Kildare—Caspar was buying."

"And you've been friends ever since."

The fish eyes glinted, managing to imply that fish have no friends while from the mouth there came the word "Yes."

As Bognor scribbled some more, Fritters said, "I will be honest with you, Inspector Bognor. There is more than honor at stake in this tournament."

"Uh huh?" Bognor's pencil froze between pad and pocket. He waited.

"We are playing for money," said Fritters. "Several different wagers. Many millions of dollars."

Outside in the darkness a hyena laughed, the sound echoed by another and another, cackling through the night and then cutting out as abruptly as it had begun.

"But a few million dollars are of no great concern to men like you and Carrington-Fortescue," said Bognor, uncertain about whether or not he believed this.

"I assure you, there are enough million dollars at risk for men like me and Caspar to be quite concerned." Fritters shot his cuff and glanced at his watch—one of a limited Cartier edition. "There is serious money riding on this elephant polo."

"Serious enough for foul play?"

The Swiss raised a beautifully trimmed eyebrow.

"You said it, Mr. Bognor, not I." He drew his lips into a thin red line. "Without Caspar, we stand to lose more than I frankly care to."

There was not a lot to go on. Bognor did some more, frankly desultory interviewing and conducted an equally desultory search of Carrington-Fortescue's room. He found nothing of much interest except for a lubrication designed to improve sexual performance and a well thumbed, morocco-bound volume called *Diaries of Colonel Sir Carrington Fortescue Bt*. Bognor confiscated it but left the ointment where it was. Monica might have gained a false impression.

"I found this," he said in their tent, squatting on his camp bed and squinting at the title page in the flickering light of the Tilley lamp. "It's either by some sort of ancestor or that's where our man cribbed his name from."

Monica snatched it from him and pursed her lips.

"Of course," she said, "Fortescue, the lepidopterist. He discovered *Oniscus Fortescus*."

"What's that?" asked Bognor, impressed.

"Himalayan wood louse," said Monica reflectively. "He did a lot of exploring round here. Disappeared trying to climb Annapurna when he was sixty-three. He had a bee in his bonnet about Tibetan treasure. Sometime in the Fifth Century, brigands robbed the great temple in Lhasa and they escaped this way. They were caught and killed, but they never found the treasure. Fortescue spent a lot of time looking for it, in between the butterflies and the wood lice."

"But he never found it?"

"No."

Monica turned the pages, frowning.

"Funny," she said, "there are some pages missing." She turned to the back of the book and sucked her teeth. "And end papers, too. There was a map here but it's been torn out. The plot thickens."

"You think the modern Carrington-Fortescue has gone after the treasure?"

Monica shrugged. "It's possible," she said. "I know it's circumstantial, but if the missing pages gave directions about finding the treasure and if there was a map and if our man did tear them out himself—then, well, maybe."

"A lot of 'ifs,'" said Bognor skeptically.

They slept on it fitfully, their slumbers broken by the shrill sounds of the wild. Bognor was unnerved by nature, even if it was only stags in Richmond Park. When its tooth and claw might be red with the blood of Caspar Carrington-Fortescue, he was really very alarmed.

In the morning, they set off early by elephant. There was a mahoot perched astride the animal's neck and one of the camp's best trackers sitting alongside Monica and Bognor in the sturdy wooden howdah. Bognor hoped he was not going to be sick. The elephant moved through the forest and later the high elephant grass as if it was a 37 bus negotiating the South Circular with a bad puncture.

Bognor had no idea where they were going. He simply put his trust in the local Nepalese who assured him there were only a few tracks along which a man could escape. There seemed little prospect of success, but in the grass by the river they surprised a one-horned rhino with her baby. Later they saw an electric-blue kingfisher and watched a sinister local crocodile, the "marsh mugger," slide stealthily into the muddy water. Once they stopped while their guide sniffed the air and said dramatically, "I smell tiger." But they did not see one.

Then, suddenly, as their elephant picked its way along a narrow track with astonishing delicacy and sure-footedness, it paused, turned momentarily to one side, and flicked its trunk into the grass, pulling it back a second later and curling it upward to the mahoot. The mahoot took a piece of paper from the trunk and handed it back to the howdah.

The Bognors looked at it with incredulity. It was a page from the diaries of Sir Carrington-Fortescue.

"Good grief," said Bognor, "I've heard of bloodhounds but this is ridiculous."

"Made camp by the Narayani River," Bognor read, "and shot deer, which made a most substantial and not unappetizing repast. I fear poor Perkins' fever is unabated despite copious doses of my precious quinine. He is quite delirious and I do not believe he can last much longer. Spoke with the local head man, who tells me, reluctantly, that local legend has it that holy objects are buried in the hills some fifteen miles to the southwest. The people go there to worship. We are perilously short of beads but sustained by—"

"He must have dropped it," said Monica.

Their Nepalese guide was on the ground on all fours, sniffing and looking very hard in the dirt.

"Two men," he said, straightening up. "Maybe three. Less than twenty-four hours ago."

"Good man!" said Bognor, quite excited.

They pressed on. The early morning mist, damp and surprisingly thick, lifted. The sun rose higher and higher and began to burn. Bognor felt the sweat begin to trickle down his cheeks and spine. From time to time their guide, now trotting alongside, would grunt recognition of some new clue on an ever warmer trail. About two hours after the discovery of the page from Sir Carrington's diary, he let out a cry which sounded like "Eureka!" or maybe "Thalassa!" and pointed toward two short spiky hills about a mile distant. From the narrow gorge between them, there rose up a thin eddy of smoke.

"Got him!" said Bognor triumphantly.

"If the tigers haven't got him first," said his wife.

The approach was stony and treacherous and the elephant walked with caution. It was another hour before they reached the smoldering embers which were producing the smoke.

In the grass nearby they found an empty packet of yak and a bottle of Indian gin with a picture of Queen Victoria on the label. It, too, was empty. Otherwise there was no sign of life. Their guide did a lot of the theatrical sniffing and peering and pawing at the ground which was now beginning to get on Bognor's nerves, and announced that the campers had left some three hours before, heading south in the direction of the elephant polo.

"Damn!" said Bognor, wondering if Caspar Carrington-Fortescue's fingerprints were on the gin bottle and if so whether he should keep

the bottle as an exhibit. He looked up to ask his wife for advice and was surprised to find her gone.

"Monica!" he called. "Monica!"

There was an echo and his cry came floating back to him, augmented, he realized, by an answer from Monica which sounded as if it came from some way away.

"Here, noodle!" she shouted, louder this time, and Bognor saw that she had covered a couple of hundred yards in double quick time and was standing on a ledge a little way up one of the hills. He waved and walked slowly toward her, puffing in the heat.

"They've been digging," said Monica excitedly, as he came within stage-whisper distance. "There's a hole. I think he's found his treasure."

Indeed there was a large hole in the ground, but there was nothing to suggest what it might once have contained. If anything.

Bognor stared at it for a while and scratched his head.

"I think we'll have to go back to base," he said. "There's nothing more for us to do here."

It took them two hours in excruciating heat. Even the elephant perspired. When they finally hit camp, Bognor was in a bad temper. This was not improved by Danvers Smythe, who was standing by the gate tapping his riding boots with a fly whisk.

"I hope you haven't tired out that elephant," he said. "We need him for afternoon chukkas. You needn't have bothered, anyway. Carrington-Fortescue's showed up in one piece. Seems to have spent the night in the village with some native tart. Damn silly if you ask me. Very high incidence of clap in these parts. So you needn't have bothered. Too bad. Incident's closed, thank God."

Bognor looked at Monica and Monica looked at Bognor. Neither of them said a word.

Later, in the privacy of their tent, they decided that the incident was far from closed. There was no doubt in their minds that it was Carrington-Fortescue's footsteps in which they had been following, Carrington-Fortescue's fire which they had found, and that it was Carrington-Fortescue who had dug the hole.

For two days the elephant-polo tournament pursued its largely ponderous course. The Maharajahs' All India dominated their half of the draw in an entirely predictable manner while the Assassins did the same in theirs. Monica and Bognor drank Bloody Marys

outside the sponsors' tents, shouted loudly for the underdogs, giggled stupidly when elephants trod on the ball, and waited for something to happen.

By the end of day two, the finalists had been decided. Surprise, surprise: All India versus the Assassins. The match was entirely predictable but the outcome was not. That these were much the two best teams was not in doubt but which was the better was far from certain. Informed opinion, in the person of Danvers Smythe, had it that the All India men would triumph because of their superior rapport with both elephant and mahoot. The Bognors, however, noticed that the stickplay and tactics of the Assassins was a degree better than the Maharajahs. Fritters seemed to have evolved one or two interesting gimmicks, including a devastating "flying wedge" and an extremely dangerous diversionary move down the left flank involving a decoy elephant and some tricky trunk play in midfield.

It was on the evening of the second day that something happened. One of the Maharajahs came to their tent wearing a blazer with Bullingdon buttons and an Arkwright and Blennerhasset tie. "I say," he said, speaking in soft, beautifully modulated Oxford English not spoken by native Englishmen since about 1956, "I wonder if you would awfully mind if I had a word. In confidence."

"My dear chap," said Bognor, slipping easily into the idiom, "but of course."

The Maharajah glanced quickly at Monica, and Bognor said quickly, "This is my wife, Monica. She—that is to say, we work as a team. No secrets. Can I offer you a drink?"

"Thank you, no." The Maharajah smiled nervously. "Would you mind if I came in? I'd rather not be spotted."

"No, no, rather," said Bognor.

It was a small, rather military tent and they only just fitted, sitting uncomfortably on the camp beds.

"I'm the Nizam of Ootacamund. Or was," said their visitor. "My friends call me Harry."

The Bognors smiled and waited.

Harry coughed and began his story. It took time to tell because he was embarrassed about it, but in essence it was simple enough. He had had an approach from Caspar Carrington-Fortescue, asking him to throw the match. Naturally, Harry had told him to get lost but Carrington-Fortescue had persisted. Perhaps the Bognors didn't know, but Harry was one of the world's great collectors of ancient religious art. What Carrington-Fortescue had offered him was a

prize beyond value—a Fifth Century treasure trove from Tibet which Harry would, in truth, give his right arm for, let alone an elephant-polo match. However, he only had Caspar's word for it. His story was that he had slipped out of camp the other night, met two local helpers, and dug up the treasure, using the directions in the diary of his ancestor, the lepidopterist. The accomplices had taken the treasure away and were even now guarding it in Caspar's room at the Yak and Yeti Hotel in Kathmandu.

Harry wanted to believe this story because he wanted the holy treasures, but he was skeptical. Caspar had told him that if he did not believe he should ask Inspector Bognor of the Board of Trade. Mr. Bognor was, he was given to understand, a graduate of the University of Oxford and he had reason to believe that Mr. Bognor had investigated Caspar's disappearance and might have grounds for thinking that Caspar did not, as advertised, spend the night with a village prostitute.

Bognor took a yak and offered the packet to Harry, who declined, lighting an oval Turkish from a shop in the Burlington Arcade instead.

"Well—" he began, and told Harry what he knew. Monica filled in the occasional gap.

When he had finished, Harry sat ruminating. Finally he said, "Mr. Bognor, the British Board of Trade has no jurisdiction here."

Bognor nodded.

"I therefore tell you in confidence that I accept what you have told me and am inclined to accept this man's offer. You may not approve but that is by the by. You may be interested to know that I am not wholly naive. I realize that there is a chance of a double-cross. In the event of that happening, I think you should know that I am an old boy of the Doon School. That is India's Eton. Everyone from Rajiv Gandhi down was at the Doon. It is a very strong Old Boy Network, and if Mr. Carrington-Fortescue offends one of its members you may be assured that if he is anywhere on the sub-continent then there will be retribution. My contacts are everywhere. I have the secret police sewn up."

Harry got to his feet, almost tripped on a guy rope, bowed to Monica and then Simon, raised his hands in farewell, and departed.

"None of our business," said Bognor. "But I'll be interested to see who has the last laugh."

The first of the last laughs went to the multi-national rich of the

Assassins. In the first chukka, the Maharajahs swept all before them, their elephants positively gamboling about the field as their riders shouted and swore and their sticks twirled as imperiously as their moustaches. At half time they led two nothing, but then Fritters must have said something to his men because the Assassins tightened up their game and drew the Maharajahs into an offside trap.

Carrington-Fortescue scored from the ensuing penalty. Seconds afterward, another Assassin, Gonzalez, mounted on the smallest, fastest elephant, put in an electrifying spurt down the left wing, drew three of the Maharajahs with him but turned out not to have the ball, which was being methodically shunted up the field by his colleagues, who were using two elephants as a protective shield. The Maharajahs couldn't get to the ball and the Assassins equalized.

At full time it was a draw, so they went into a sudden-death overtime. Harry, the Nizam, was playing at back and had, so far, shown no sign of playing other than immaculately. Now, however, Fritters and Carrington-Fortescue made a sudden break out of defense and seemed to wrong-foot his elephant. From forty yards out, Fritters essayed a shot at the goal. The ball flew straight at Harry and his elephant. Normally the back would have blocked it easily enough, but this time he seemed unsighted and the ball sailed straight through, past stick and tusks and legs and through the goal. A win for the Assassins.

After the champagne and the prize-giving, most of the players were returning to Kathmandu together on an old Dakota which used the polo field as a landing strip. The Maharajahs, dignified in defeat, were overnighing in Kathmandu, where Harry, presumably, would be picking up the treasure from the Yak and Yeti. The Assassins were connecting with the evening flight to Delhi, which meant an hour-and-a-half wait in the squalid transit lounge at Kathmandu.

Before they boarded the Dakota, Monica and Bognor saw Harry and Carrington-Fortescue engaged in earnest conversation. Harry had his arm round Caspar and was seen to press a package into his hand.

Bognor could not resist it. "I say," he said, buttonholing Harry a moment later, "did I just see you give a present to our friend?"

The Nizam smiled knowingly. "Mr. Carrington-Fortescue is worried that his sexual powers may be waning," he said. "He told me

in confidence when he— Well—I have made him a present of powdered rhinoceros horn. Well-known aphrodisiac. Very rare.”

“Oh,” said Bognor, surprised.

There were farewells at Kathmandu and then the Assassins opened a jeroboam of Veuve Clicquot they had secreted in a Vuitton suitcase and invited the Bognors to join them.

“Can’t thank you enough,” said Carrington-Fortescue, “for authenticating my story. Harry would never have believed it without your corroboration. I’m very grateful.”

“You set me up,” said Bognor ruefully.

“You could say that.” Carrington-Fortescue smiled. “No harm done, though. That wally Nizam won’t discover there’s nothing in the sacks until we’re well clear of here. I told my chaps to stall for a couple of hours. We’ll be halfway to Delhi by then. Clever, eh?” And he laughed his last laugh.

Just then a small posse of very small, very tough, khaki-clad police entered the room and advanced on the champagne drinkers. Their leader, an impressive figure with white puttees and a swagger stick, said briskly but courteously, “Mr. Carrington-Fortescue?”

“Yes,” said Carrington-Fortescue, frozen in mid-laugh.

“Please come this way. I have a warrant for your arrest.”

“I say!” The polo-playing property magnate was thunderstruck.

“We believe,” said the policeman, “that you are in possession of a quantity of rhinoceros horn.” (He had obviously learned police argot at the Police College in Hendon.) “The rhinoceros is a protected animal in Nepal. Penalty for possession and attempted export of rhino horn is five-years imprisonment and one hundred fifty lashes. Come this way, please.”

Bognor looked at Monica, Monica looked at Bognor. Both had no trouble at all in imagining Harry, the Nizam of Ootacamunde, in the bar of the Yak and Yeti, enjoying his own glass of champagne and what looked like being the definitively final laugh of this year’s elephant-polo tournament.

“Now I know,” said Bognor, “why Harry went off with all my medical chest full of Beecham’s Powders. It takes a con man to know a con man.”

“Q”

a distinguished reprint by

ALICE WALKER

*A mesmerizing story about the subtle and unsubtle ways we do violence to one another, often through sex, by Alice Walker, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Color Purple* is affecting readers and moviegoers all over the world.*

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"REALLY, DOESN'T CRIME PAY?"

by ALICE WALKER

SEPTEMBER, 1961

page 118

I sit here by the window in a house with a thirty-year mortgage, writing in this notebook, looking down at my Helena Rubenstein hands . . . and why not? Since I am not a serious writer my nails need not be bitten off, my cuticles need not have jagged edges. I can indulge myself—my hands—in Herbessence nail-soak, polish, lo-

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tions, and creams. The result is a truly beautiful pair of hands: sweet-smelling, small, and soft . . .

I lift them from the page where I have written the line “Really, *Doesn't Crime Pay?*” and send them seeking up my shirt front (it is a white and frilly shirt) and smoothly up the column of my throat, where gardenia scent floats beneath my hairline. If I should spread my arms and legs or whirl, just for an instant, the sweet smell of my body would be more than I could bear. But I fit into my new surroundings perfectly; like a jar of cold cream melting on a mirrored vanity shelf.

page 119

“I have a surprise for you,” Ruel said, the first time he brought me here. And you know how sick he makes me now when he grins.

“What is it?” I asked, not caring in the least.

And that is how we drove up to the house. Four bedrooms and two toilets and a half.

“Isn't it a beauty?” he said, not touching me, but urging me out of the car with the phony enthusiasm of his voice.

“Yes,” I said. It is “a beauty.” Like new Southern houses everywhere. The bricks resemble cubes of raw meat; the roof pressed down, a field hat made of iron. The windows are narrow, beady eyes; the aluminum glints. The yard is a long undressed wound, the few trees as bereft of foliage as hairpins stuck in a mud cake.

“Yes,” I say, “it sure is a beauty.” He beams, in his chill and reassured way. I am startled that he doesn't still wear some kind of military uniform. But no. He came home from Korea a hero, and a glutton for sweet smells.

“Here we can forget the past,” he says.

page 120

We have moved in and bought new furniture. The place reeks of newness, the green walls turn me bilious. He stands behind me, his hands touching the edges of my hair. I pick up my hairbrush and brush his hands away. I have sweetened my body to such an extent that even he (especially he) may no longer touch it.

I do not want to forget the past; but I say "Yes," like a parrot. "We can forget the past here."

The past of course is Mordecai Rich, the man who, Ruel claims, caused my breakdown. The past is the night I tried to murder Ruel with one of his chain saws.

MAY, 1958

page 2

Mordecai Rich

Mordecai does not believe Ruel Johnson is my husband. "*That* old man," he says, in a mocking, cruel way.

"Ruel is not old," I say. "Looking old is just his way." Just as, I thought, looking young is your way, although you're probably not much younger than Ruel.

Maybe it is just that Mordecai is a vagabond, scribbling down impressions of the South, from no solid place, going to none . . . and Ruel has never left Hancock County, except once, when he gallantly went off to war. He claims travel broadened him, especially his two months of European leave. He married me because although my skin is brown he thinks I look like a Frenchwoman. Sometimes he tells me I look Oriental: Korean or Japanese. I console myself with this thought: My family tends to darken and darken as we get older. One day he may wake up in bed with a complete stranger.

"He works in the store," I say. "He also raises a hundred acres of peanuts." Which is surely success.

"That many," muses Mordecai.

It is not pride that makes me tell him what my husband does, is. It is a way I can tell him about myself.

page 4

Today Mordecai is back. He tells a funny/sad story about a man in town who could not move his wife. "He huffed and puffed," laughed Mordecai, "to no avail." Then one night as he was sneaking up to her bedroom he heard joyous cries. Rushing in he found his wife in

the arms of another woman! The wife calmly dressed and began to pack her bags. The husband begged and pleaded. ‘‘Anything you want,’’ he promised. ‘‘What *do* you want?’’ he pleaded. The wife began to chuckle and, laughing, left the house with her friend.

Now the husband gets drunk every day and wants an ordinance passed. He cannot say what the ordinance will be against, but that is what he buttonholes people to say: ‘‘I want a goddam ordinance passed!’’ People who know the story make jokes about him. They pity him and give him enough money to keep him drunk.

page 5

I think Mordecai Rich has about as much heart as a dirt-eating toad. Even when he makes me laugh I know that nobody ought to look on other people's confusion with that cold an eye.

‘‘But that's what I am,’’ he says, flipping through the pages of his scribble pad. ‘‘A cold eye. An eye looking for Beauty. An eye looking for Truth.’’

‘‘Why don't you look for other things?’’ I want to know. ‘‘Like neither Truth nor Beauty, but places in people's lives where things have just slipped a good bit off the track.’’

‘‘That's too vague,’’ said Mordecai, frowning.

‘‘So is Truth,’’ I said. ‘‘Not to mention Beauty.’’

page 10

Ruel wants to know why ‘‘the skinny black tramp’’—as he calls Mordecai—keeps hanging around. I made the mistake of telling him Mordecai is thinking of using our house as the setting for one of his Southern country stories.

‘‘Mordecai is from the North,’’ I said. ‘‘He never saw a wooden house with a toilet in the yard.’’

‘‘Well, maybe he better go back where he from,’’ said Ruel, ‘‘and shit the way he's used to.’’

It's Ruel's pride that is hurt. He's ashamed of this house that seems perfectly adequate to me. One day we'll have a new house, he says, of brick, with a Japanese bath. How should I know why?

page 11

When I told Mordecai what Ruel said he smiled in that snake-eyed way he has and said, "Do you mind me hanging around?"

I didn't know what to say. I stammered something. Not because of his question but because he put his hand point-blank on my left nipple. He settled his other hand deep in my hair.

"I am married more thoroughly than a young boy like you could guess," I told him. But I don't expect that to stop him. Especially since the day he found out I wanted to be a writer myself.

It happened this way: I was writing in the grape arbor, on the ledge by the creek that is hidden from the house by trees. He was right in front of me before I could put my notebook away. He snatched it from me and began to read. What is worse, he read aloud. I was embarrassed to death.

"'No wife of mine is going to embarrass me with a lot of foolish, vulgar stuff,'" Mordecai read. (This is Ruel's opinion of my writing.) "Every time he tells me how peculiar I am for wanting to write stories he brings up having a baby or going shopping, as if these things are the same. Just something to occupy my time.

"'If you have time on your hands,'" he said today, 'why don't you go shopping in that new store in town.'

"I went. I bought six kinds of face cream, two eyebrow pencils, five nightgowns, and a longhaired wig. Two contour sticks and a pot of gloss for my lips.

"And all the while I was grieving over my last story. Outlined—which is as far as I take stories now—but dead in embryo. My hand stilled by cowardice, my heart the heart of a slave."

page 14

Of course Mordecai wanted to see the story. What did I have to lose?

"Flip over a few pages," I said. "It is the very skeleton of a story, but one that maybe someday I will write."

"The One-Legged Woman," Mordecai began to read aloud, then continued silently.

The characters are poor dairy farmers. One morning the husband is too hung over to do the milking. His wife does it and when she has finished the

cows are frightened by thunder and stampede, trampling her. She is also hooked severely in one leg. Her husband is asleep and does not hear her cry out. Finally she drags herself home and wakes him up. He washes her wounds and begs her to forgive him. He does not go for a doctor because he is afraid the doctor will accuse him of being lazy and a drunk, undeserving of his good wife. He wants the doctor to respect him. The wife, understanding, goes along with this.

However, gangrene sets in and the doctor comes. He lectures the husband and amputates the leg of the wife. The wife lives and tries to forgive her husband for his weakness.

While she is ill the husband tries to show he loves her, but cannot look at the missing leg. When she is well he finds he can no longer make love to her. The wife, sensing his revulsion, understands her sacrifice was for nothing. She drags herself to the barn and hangs herself.

The husband, ashamed that anyone should know he was married to a one-legged woman, buries her himself and later tells everyone that she is visiting her mother.

While Mordecai was reading the story I looked out over the fields. If he says one good thing about what I've written, I promised myself, I will go to bed with him. (How else could I repay him? All I owned in any supply were my jars of cold cream!) As if he read my mind he sank down on the seat beside me and looked at me strangely.

"You think about things like this?" he asked.

He took me in his arms, right there in the grape arbor. "You sure do have a lot of heavy, sexy hair," he said, placing me gently on the ground. After that, a miracle happened. Under Mordecai's fingers my body opened like a flower and carefully bloomed. And it was strange as well as wonderful. For I don't think love had anything to do with this at all.

page 17

After that, Mordecai praised me for my intelligence, my sensitivity, the depth of the work he had seen—and naturally I showed him everything I had: old journals from high school, notebooks I kept hidden under tarpaulin in the barn, stories written on paper bags, on table napkins, even on shelf paper from over the sink. I am amazed—even more amazed than Mordecai—by the amount of stuff

I have written. It is over twenty years’ worth, and would fill, easily, a small shed.

“You must give these to me,” Mordecai said finally, holding three notebooks he selected from the rather messy pile. “I will see if something can’t be done with them. You could be another Zora Hurston—” he smiled “—another Simone de Beauvoir!”

Of course I am flattered. “Take it! Take it!” I cry. Already I see myself as he sees me. A famous authoress, miles away from Ruel, miles away from anybody. I am dressed in dungarees, my hands are a mess. I smell of sweat. I glow with happiness.

“How could such pretty brown fingers write such ugly, deep stuff?” Mordecai asks, kissing them.

page 20

For a week we deny each other nothing. If Ruel knows (how could he not know? his sheets are never fresh) he says nothing. I realize now that he never considered Mordecai a threat. Because Mordecai seems to have nothing to offer but his skinny self and his funny talk. I gloat over this knowledge. Now Ruel will find that I am not a womb without a brain that can be bought with Japanese bathtubs and shopping sprees. The moment of my deliverance is at hand!

page 24

Mordecai did not come today. I sit in the arbor writing down those words and my throat begins to close up. I am nearly strangled by my fear.

page 56

I have not noticed anything for weeks. Not Ruel, not the house. Everything whispers to me that Mordecai has forgotten me. Yesterday Ruel told me not to go into town and I said I wouldn’t, for I have been hunting Mordecai up and down the streets. People look at me strangely, their glances slide off me in a peculiar way. It is as if they see something on my face that embarrasses them. Does everyone know about Mordecai and me? Does good loving show so

soon? . . . But it is not soon. He has been gone already longer than I have known him.

page 61

Ruel tells me I act like my mind's asleep. It is asleep, of course. Nothing will wake it but a letter from Mordecai telling me to pack my bags and fly to New York.

page 65

If I could have read Mordecai's scribble pad I would know exactly what he thought of me. But now I realize he never once offered to show it to me, though he had a chance to read every serious thought I ever had. I'm afraid to know what he thought. I feel crippled, deformed. But if he ever wrote it down, that would make it true.

page 66

Today Ruel brought me in from the grape arbor, out of the rain. I didn't know it was raining. "Old folks like us might catch rheumatism if we don't be careful," he joked. I don't know what he means. I am thirty-two. He is forty. I never felt old before this month.

page 79

Ruel came up to bed last night and actually cried in my arms! He would give anything for a child, he says.

"Do you think we could have one?" he said.

"Sure," I said. "Why not?"

He began to kiss me and carry on about my goodness. I began to laugh. He became very angry, but finished what he started. He really does intend to have a child.

page 80

I must really think of something better to do than kill myself.

page 81

Ruel wants me to see a doctor about speeding up conception of the child.

"Will you go, honey?" he asks, like a beggar.

"Sure," I say. "Why not?"

page 82

Today at the doctor's office the magazine I was reading fell open at a story about a one-legged woman. They had a picture of her, drawn by someone who painted the cows orange and green, and painted the woman white, like a white cracker, with little slit-blue eyes. Not black and heavy like she was in the story I had in mind. But it is still my story, filled out and switched about as things are. The author is said to be Mordecai Rich. They show a little picture of him on a back page. He looks severe and has grown a beard. And underneath his picture there is that same statement he made to me about going around looking for Truth.

They say his next book will be called *The Black Woman's Resistance to Creativity in the Arts*.

page 86

Last night while Ruel snored on his side of the bed I washed the prints of his hands off my body. Then I plugged in one of his chain saws and tried to slice off his head. This failed because of the noise. Ruel woke up right in the nick of time.

page 95

The days pass in a haze that is not unpleasant. The doctors and nurses do not take me seriously. They fill me full of drugs and never even bother to lock the door. When I think of Ruel I think of the song the British sing: "Ruel Britannia"! I can even whistle it, or drum it with my fingers.

SEPTEMBER, 1961

page 218

People tell my husband all the time that I do not look crazy. I have been out for almost a year and he is beginning to believe them. Nights, he climbs on me with his slobber and his hope, cursing Mordecai Rich for messing up his life. I wonder if he feels our wills clashing in the dark. Sometimes I see the sparks fly inside my head. It is amazing how normal everything is.

page 223

The house still does not awaken to the pitter-patter of sweet little feet, because I religiously use the Pill. It is the only spot of humor in my entire day, when I am gulping that little yellow tablet and washing it down with soda pop or tea. Ruel spends long hours at the store and in the peanut field. He comes in sweaty, dirty, tired, and I wait for him smelling of Arpège, My Sin, Wind Song, and Jungle Gardenia. The women of the community feel sorry for him, to be married to such a fluff of nothing.

I wait, beautiful and perfect in every limb, cooking supper as if my life depended on it. Lying unresisting on his bed like a drowned body washed to shore. But he is not happy. For he knows now that I intend to do nothing but say yes until he is completely exhausted.

I go to the new shopping mall twice a day now; once in the morning and once in the afternoon, or at night. I buy hats I would not dream of wearing, or even owning. Dresses that are already on their way to Goodwill. Shoes that will go to mold and mildew in the cellar. And I keep the bottles of perfume, the skin softeners, the pots of gloss and eye shadow. I amuse myself painting my own face.

When he is quite, quite tired of me I will tell him how long I've relied on the security of the Pill. When I am quite, quite tired of the sweet, sweet smell of my body and the softness of these Helena Rubenstein hands I will leave him and this house. Leave them forever without once looking back.

a distinguished reprint by

DAPHNE du MAURIER

The style and setting of this story by Daphne du Maurier are dramatically different from those of Alice Walker's "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" yet there are surprising similarities and counterpoints—in the sense of emotional disorder, for instance, and in the recognition of what seclusion and betrayal can do to the soul.

Meet Guthrie and Jane, lifelong inhabitants of St. Hilda's, a small island west of the Scillies, the Scillies themselves southwest of Daphne du Maurier's own wild and beloved Cornwall . . .

EAST WIND

by DAPHNE du MAURIER

Nearly a hundred miles west of the Scillies, far from the main track of ships, lies the small, rocky island of St. Hilda's. Only a few miles square, it is a barren, rugged place, with great jagged cliffs that run steep into deep water. The harbor is hardly more than a creek, and the entrance like a black hole cut out of the rock. The island rises out of the sea a queer, misshapen crag, splendid in its desolation, with a grey face lifted to the four winds. It might have been thrown up from the depths of the Atlantic in a moment of great unrest, and set there, a small defiant piece of land, to withstand forever the anger of the sea. Over a century ago few knew of its existence, and the many sailors who saw its black outline on the horizon imagined it to be little more than a solitary rock, standing like a sentinel in mid-ocean.

The population of St. Hilda's has never exceeded seventy, and the people are descendants of the original settlers from the Scillies and

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Western Ireland. Their only means of livelihood used to be the catching of fish and the cultivation of the soil. Today things are greatly changed, owing to the monthly call of a coastal steamer and the installation of wireless. But in the middle half of the last century, years would sometimes pass without communication with the mainland, and the people had degenerated into quiet, listless folk, the inevitable result of intermarriage.

There were no books then, no papers, and even the small chapel that had been built by the original settlers had fallen into disuse. Year in, year out, the life remained unchanged, with never a new face or a fresh thought to break the monotony of the days. Sometimes, on the horizon, the faint glimmer of a sail would be seen, and the people would gaze with wonder in their eyes, but slowly the sail would become a far-off speck, and the unknown ship pass into oblivion.

They were peaceable folk, these natives of St. Hilda's, born to a quiet, untroubled existence as monotonous as the waves that broke against their shores. They knew nothing of the world beyond the island, they saw no more momentous happenings than birth and death and the changes of the seasons. Their lives were untouched by great emotions, by great sorrows. Their desires had never been lit, but lay imprisoned within their souls. They lived blindly, happily, like children, content to grope in the dark and never to search for the something that lay beyond their darkness. Some inner sense warned them that in their ignorance dwelt security, a happiness that was never wild, never triumphant, but peaceful and silent. They walked with their eyes to the ground; they had become weary of looking upon a sea where no ship came, of lifting their faces to a sky that seldom changed.

Summer and winter passed, children grew into men and women—there was no more in life than these things. Far away lay the other lands dwelt in by strange people, where the life was said to be hard and men had to fight for their existence. Sometimes an islander would sail away, shaping his course for the mainland and promising to return with news of the rest of the world. Perhaps he was drowned, or picked up by some passing ship; no one could say, for he never came back. No one who left the island returned. The few ships that so rarely visited St. Hilda's came once only and passed not again.

It was almost as if there were no such place, as if the island were a dream, a phantom creation of a sailor's brain, something rising

out of the sea at midnight as a challenge to reality, then vanishing in surf and mist to be forgotten, to be half consciously remembered years later, flickering for a bewildered second in a dusty brain as a dead thought. Yet to the people of St. Hilda's the island was reality, the ships that came and went were their phantoms.

There was only the island. Beyond it lay the ghostly, the intangible. The truth was in the seared rock, in the touch of the soil, in the sound of the waves breaking against the cliffs. This was the belief of the humble fisherfolk, and they cast their nets during the day, and gossiped over the harbor wall at evening with never a thought of the lands across the sea. At dawn the men set off to fish, and when their nets were filled they would return to the island and climb the steep path that led to the fields, to work with stolid patience at the soil.

The group of cottages was clustered together at the water's edge, with seldom more than two rooms to contain an entire family. Here the women bent over their fires, cooked, and darned their men's clothes, talking peacefully from dawn till dusk.

One cottage stood apart from the others, built high on the cliff and looking down upon the creek. Today only the site remains, and instead of a cottage stands the ugly wireless station; but sixty years ago this was the home of the chief fisherman of St. Hilda's. Here Guthrie dwelt with his wife Jane, living as children, content in each other, unmindful of desire, ignorant of distress.

Guthrie stood on the cliffs at twilight, watching the sea. Below him in the harbor the fishing boats rocked, moored for the night. The men gossiped over the harbor wall and the sound of their voices rose to him, mingled with the thin cries of children. The little quay was slippery with spray and blood and the scales of dead fish. The smoke curled from the chimneys, a thin blue column, twisting and turning in the air. From the door of his cottage came Jane, her hands to her eyes, searching for him. "Come away down!" she called. "The supper's been ready an hour since. Ye'll find un spoilt, as likely as not."

He waved his arm and turned, pausing to glance at the horizon for the last time. The sky was speckled with white loose-flocked clouds, and the sea, changing from the oily smoothness of the day, was running past the harbor in a low swell. Already there was a wash upon the rocks, at the eastward entrance. A soft humming sound came to his ears, as the sea gathered force, and a cool breeze

played with his hair. He ran down the hill to the village, and cried to the fishermen who were standing by the wall.

"'Tis the East Wind startin'," he told them. "Can't ye see the sky like a fish's tail, and the big lumpin' sea awash on the rocks? Before midnight there'll be a gale to blow your heads off, and the sea angrier than the devil himself. Look to the boats."

The harbor was sheltered from the wind, yet the vessels were moored securely fore and aft to prevent the possibility of their breaking adrift.

After he had seen that everything was safe for the night, Guthrie climbed the path to his cottage on the cliff. He ate his supper in silence. He felt restless and excited; the quiet atmosphere of the cottage seemed to oppress him. He tried to occupy himself in mending a hole in one of his nets, but he could not give his mind to the task. The net slipped from his hands; he turned his head and listened. It seemed as if a cry had risen out of the night. Yet there was nothing, only the low hum of the wind, and the sound of surf breaking upon the rocks. He sighed and gazed into the fire, oddly disturbed, his soul heavy within him.

In the bedroom, with her head by the window, Jane knelt, listening to the sea. Her heart beat strangely, her hands trembled, she wanted to creep from the cottage and run onto the cliffs where she would feel the true force of the wind. It would strike upon her breast and sweep the hair from her face, she would hear the singing of it in her ears, she would smell the salt tang of the spray as it stung her lips and her eyes. The longing came upon her to laugh with the wind, to cry with the sea, to open wide her arms and be possessed by something which would envelop her like a dark cloak and prevent her from straying far away on the lonely cliffs amongst the tall grass. She prayed for the day to dawn, not gently as was its custom, but fiercely, with the sun burning the fields and the wind sweeping the white-edged seas, bringing destruction. She would stand and wait upon the shore, feeling the wet sand beneath her naked feet.

A footstep sounded outside the room and she turned with a little shiver from the window. It was Guthrie. He gazed at her solemnly and bade her shut out the sound of the wind. They undressed quietly and lay beside each other in the narrow bed without a word. He could feel the warmth of her body, but his heart was not with her. His thoughts left his form, imprisoned there at her side, and fled into the night. She felt him go, yet minded not. She put away his

cold hands from her, and gave herself to her own dreams, where he could have no entrance.

Thus they slept together in each other's arms, yet separately, like dead things in a grave, their souls long vanished and forgotten.

When they awoke, the dawn had broken in the sky. The sun shone blindly from a blue heaven, scorching the earth. Great seas, tipped with foam, crashed against the cliff and swept the rocks outside the harbor, and all the while the East Wind blew, tossing the grass, scattering the hot white sand, forcing its triumphant path through the white mist and the green waves like a demon let loose upon the island.

Guthrie went to the window and looked out upon the day. A cry came from his lips and he ran from the cottage, unable to believe his eyes. Jane followed him. The folk in the other cottages had risen, too, and stood staring at the harbor, their hands lifted in amazement, their excited voices filling the air with sound yet fading away, indistinguishable from the wind. For there in the harbor, dwarfing the little fishing boats with her great spars, the sails stretched upon her yards to dry in the morning sun, lay a brig at anchor, rocking against wind and tide.

Guthrie stood on the quay amongst the crowd of fishermen. The whole of St. Hilda's was gathered there to welcome the strangers from the brig. Tall, dark men they were, these sailors from beyond the sea, with narrow almond eyes and white teeth that gleamed as they laughed. They spoke in a different tongue. Guthrie and his fellows questioned them, while the women and children surrounded them with gaping mouths, gazing into their faces, feeling their clothes with timid, wondering hands.

"How did ye find the entrance to the harbor," cried Guthrie, "with the wind an' the eye in league together against ye? 'Tis the devil himself that hath sent ye here maybe."

The sailors laughed and shook their heads. They could not understand what he said. Their eyes wandered beyond him and the fishermen to the women. They smiled and spoke amongst themselves, happy at their discovery.

All the while the sun beat down upon their heads and the East Wind blew, scorching the air like a breath from hell. No man went forth to fish that day. Great mountainous seas thundered past the harbor mouth and the fishing boats remained at anchor, small and insignificant beside the strange brig.

Something of madness seemed to fall upon the people of St. Hilda's. Their nets lay neglected and unmended beside their cottage doors, the fields and flowers remained untended on the hills above the village. There was no interest in their lives but the sailors from the ship. They clambered upon the brig, leaving no part of her unvisited, they touched the strangers' clothes with excited, inquisitive fingers. The sailors laughed at them, they hunted in the sea chests and gave the men cigarettes, they found bright scarves and colored kerchiefs for the women. Guthrie led them out upon the cliffs, swaggering a little like a young boy, a cigarette between his lips.

The fishermen threw wide their cottage doors, jealous of one another's hospitality, each one desirous of extending the greatest welcome. The sailors soon explored the island; they thought it a poor, barren place, without interest. They descended to the shore and formed themselves into groups on the quayside, yawning, idle, hoping for a change of weather. The time hung heavily upon their hands.

Still the East Wind blew, scattering the sand, turning the earth to dust. The sun blazed from a cloudless sky, the big seas swept round the shores, green, foam-flecked, twisting and turning like a live thing. The sun set streaky and windswept, pointing orange fingers to the sky. The night came, warm and alive. The very air was restless. The sailors found the disused chapel at the end of the village and encamped there, fetching tobacco and brandy from the brig.

There seemed to be no order amongst them. They had no discipline, they obeyed no rules. Two men only remained on the brig to watch. The fisherfolk wondered not at their conduct; their presence on the island was so wonderful and rare a thing, nothing counted but this. They joined the sailors in the chapel, they tasted brandy for the first time. The night rang with cries and song. The island was a new place now, broken of peace, swayed by suggestion, and filled with strange desires.

Guthrie stood amongst his companions, his cheeks flushed, his cold eyes bright and foolish. He held a glass in his hand, he swallowed the brandy with deep, contented draughts. He laughed with the sailors, wildly, without reason; what did it matter if he could not understand their words? The lights swayed before his eyes, the ground sloped beneath his feet, it seemed as if he had never lived before. The wind could shout and the sea thunder and roar, the world called to him now. Beyond the island lay the other lands, the homes of these sailors. Here he would find life, and beauty, and strange,

incredible adventures. No more would he bend his back, toiling at the useless soil. The songs of the sailors rang in his ears, the tobacco smoke blinded his eyes, the brandy seemed to mix with the blood in his veins.

The women danced with the sailors. Someone had found a concertina, and a fiddle with three strings. Crazy tunes broke into the air. The women had never danced before. They were whirled from their feet, their petticoats flying out behind them. The sailors laughed and sang, beating the measure with their feet upon the floor. The fishermen lolled stupidly against the walls, drunken, happy, careless of time. A sailor came across to Jane and smiled, holding out his arms. She danced with him, flushed, excited, eager to please.

Faster, faster went the music, and faster flew their feet around the room. She felt his arm tighten round her waist, and was aware of the warmth of his body against hers. She could feel his breath upon her cheek. She raised her head and met his eyes. They looked into hers, seeing her naked, and he moistened his lips with his tongue. They smiled, reading each other's thoughts. An exquisite shudder, like the touch of a cool hand, ran through her. Her legs felt weak beneath her. She lowered her eyes, conscious of desire, and turned to see if Guthrie had noticed, guilty for the first time.

And the East Wind blew against the church, shaking the roof, and the surf broke and thundered on the shore.

The next day dawned the same, hot and relentless.

The wind did not weaken in its power, nor the sea lessen in its fury. The brig still rolled at her moorings amongst the fishing boats. The fishermen leant with the sailors against the harbor wall, drinking and smoking, without thought, without energy, cursing the wind. The women idled at their cooking, neglected their mending. They stood at the doors of the cottages, new scarves round their shoulders, scarlet handkerchieves upon their heads, impatient with the children, restless, waiting for a smile.

The day passed thus, and another night, and yet another day. The sun shone, the sea shuddered and crashed, the wind blew. No one left the harbor to fish, no one worked on the land. There seemed no shade on the island, the grass lay brown and withered, the leaves hung parched and despondent from the few trees. Night fell once more and the wind had not ceased. Guthrie sat in the cottage, his head between his hands, his brain empty.

He felt ill and tired, like a very old man. Only one thing could prevent the sound of the wind from screaming in his ears and the heat of the sun from scorching his eyes. His lungs were dry, his throat ached. He staggered from the cottage and went down the hill to the church, where the sailors and the fishermen lay in heaps upon the floor, the brandy running from their mouths. He flung himself amongst them and drank greedily, senselessly, giving himself to it, forgetting the wind and the sea.

Jane closed the cottage door behind her and ran out onto the cliffs. The tall grass bathed her ankles and the wind leapt through her hair. It sang in her ears, a triumphant call. The sea flung itself upon the rocks below and loose flecks of foam scattered up toward her. She knew that if she waited he would come to her from the chapel. All day his eyes had followed her as she walked amongst the sailors by the harbor wall. Nothing mattered but this. Guthrie was drunk, asleep, forgotten, but here on the cliffs the stars shone upon her, and the East Wind blew. A dark shadow appeared from behind a clump of trees. For one moment she was afraid. One moment only.

"Who are you?" she called, but her voice fled to the wind.

The sailor came toward her. He flung off her clothes with deft, accustomed fingers; she put her hands before her eyes to hide her face. He laughed, and buried his lips in her hair. She stood then with arms outstretched, waiting, naked and unashamed, like a white phantom, broken and swept by the wind. Down in the chapel the men shouted and sang. They fought amongst themselves, mad with drink. One fisherman threw a knife and pinned his brother against the wall. He writhed like a serpent, screaming with pain.

Guthrie rose to his feet. "Quiet, you dogs!" he shouted. "Can you not drink in peace, and leave men to their dreams? Is it like this you wait for the wind to change?"

Jeers and laughter drowned his voice. A man pointed a trembling finger at him. "Aye, talk of peace, Guthrie, you weak-limbed fool. With your wife even now shaming your bed with a stranger. We'll have new blood in the island, I reckon." A chorus of voices joined in, laughing, and they pointed at him. "Aye, Guthrie, look to your wife!"

He leapt at them with a cry of rage, smashing their faces. But they were too many for him, they threw him from the chapel, flinging him onto the rough quayside. He lay stunned for a moment, then shook himself like a dog and rose to his feet. So Jane was a wanton. Jane had deceived him. He remembered his wife's body, white and

slim. A haze of madness came over him, mingled with hatred and desire. He stumbled through the darkness, up the hill to the cottage. There was no light in any of the windows; the rooms were empty.

"Jane," he called, "Jane, where be ye hidin' with your damned cur lover?" No one answered. Sobbing with rage, he tore an axe from the wall—a great clumsy tool, used for chopping firewood. "Jane," he called once more, "come out, will ye?"

His voice was powerless against the wind that shook the walls of the cottage. He crouched by the door and waited, the axe in his hands. Hours passed and he sat in a stupor, awaiting her return:

Before dawn she came, pale and trembling, like a lost thing. He heard her footfall on the path. A twig snapped under her feet. The axe uplifted.

"Guthrie," she screamed, "Guthrie, let me alone, let me alone." She spread her hands in supplication, but he pushed them aside and brought the axe down upon her head, crumpling her, smashing her skull. She fell to the ground, twisted, unrecognizable, ghastly. He leant over her, peering at her body, breathing heavily. The blood ran before his eyes. He sat down by her side, his senses swimming, his mind vacant. He fell into a drunken sleep, his head pillowed on her breast.

When he awoke, sober, himself again, he found her dead body at his feet. He gazed at it in horror, not understanding. The axe was still upon the floor. He lay stunned, sick and frightened, unable to move. Then he listened, as if for an accustomed sound. All was silent. Something had changed. The wind. He could no longer hear the wind.

He staggered to his feet and looked out upon the island. The air was cool. Rain had fallen while he slept. From the southwest blew a cool, steady breeze. The sea was grey and calm. Far on the horizon lay a black dot, her white sails outlined against the sky.

The brig had gone with the morning tide.



THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

When I was putting together my *Crime Fiction: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (1984), I decided to provide author by author references to those studies of the field which provided the broadest and most reliable coverage, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. I found eight such volumes, ranging from H. Douglas Thomson's *Masters of Mystery* (1931) to John M. Reilly's *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* (1980; revised 1985). A ninth work of this sort, with the most extensive author coverage of all, has now been issued, and I shall add it with pleasure to the citations in future editions of my bibliography.

This is *1001 Midnights*, "The Aficionados Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction," by Bill Pronzini and Marcia Muller (Arbor House, \$39.95). Pronzini and Muller contribute most of the 1001 entries, but they are joined by 26 other commentators, chosen for specialized expertise. The average quality level is notably high, with Pronzini's own entries being among the most forceful and wise; also especially good are those by Robert E. Briney, Bill Crider, Marvin Lachman, and Francis M. Nevins, Jr. In a work of this nature, certain defects are perhaps unavoidable: unevenness and, given the freedom granted to contributors, some idiosyncrasy in selection of authors

and individual novels and short-story collections to be covered. But the approach of pinning general evaluation of more than 670 different authors (with over 700 by-lines) on commentary on one (mostly) to five specific titles by each author is quite effective, and a good effort to cross-reference the whole work is also made. You'll cherish this on your reference shelves for many years to come.

Sheila Radley's fifth novel about Detective Inspector Douglas Quantrill is *Fate Worse Than Death* (Scribners, \$13.95), a fascinating and evocative tale of a Suffolk village and the kidnaping of a bride-to-be. Sandra Websdell disappeared on her wedding eve; it was generally thought she had developed cold feet and left voluntarily till her body turned up, lovingly laid out in a vacant cottage. At the same time, Quantrill's subordinate, the greedy and ambitious Inspector Martin Tait, is visiting his aunt—from whom he expects to inherit a fortune—in the same village and romancing Quantrill's daughter. Somewhere at least one sick mind is at work, and more than one villager has much to hide. Radley here brings an array of rural gentry, their interplay and closed ranks against the police, to full life. Excellent!

Unbalanced Accounts (Little Brown, \$14.95) is the debut of Kate Gallison, a New Jersey writer of

software manuals. This short novel is a private-eye parody, introducing fumbling Nick Magaracz, an investigator whose adultery business has declined with the relaxing of divorce laws. Some checks have disappeared from New Jersey's Bureau of Mental Rehabilitation in Trenton; the manager of the Accounts Division only has authorization to hire an accountant, so Nick the "accountant" is employed to find the checks. He gets to know the office staff and their intrigues; little does he know about the Boardwalk View Rest Home, a gangster-run horror in Atlantic City, and its role in the affair. This is amusingly done, with some genuinely hilarious passages and characters.

The first work of fiction by Sophie Belfort (the pseudonym of a historian living in New England) is *The Lace Curtain Murders* (Atheneum, \$14.95), a literate and involving tale, though it perhaps betrays Belfort's too worshipful study of Amanda Cross. The setting is Massachusetts, where the corpse is provided by state senator Mary Agnes O'Pake. The O'Pake had been, among other grievous faults, a chief fundraiser for the IRA, and her passing is largely unmourned. Sleuthing is done by Nick Hannibal, a policeman with a classical education and a bent for literary allusions, and Molly Rafferty, professor of history with a matching bent. This circumstance leads to a bent toward sex, as might be expected from the tenor of our times; perhaps even love may result. The criminous side of the mat-

ter has a more peculiar outcome, leaving justice also bent—out of shape. Belfort should find more of her own voice in time; she'll be worth waiting for.

Liza Cody's fourth novel about private investigator Anna Lee is *Head Case* (Scribners, \$13.95). Thea Hahn is the 16-year-old daughter of a proper, well-to-do suburban household. She is very intelligent, very proper, very predictable—but also, alas, very missing. Robert Hahn, the proper father, comes to Brierly Security and Martin Brierly gives the case to Anna. Then Thea turns up on her own, in a near catatonic state and in dangerous proximity to a corpse, probably murdered. Proper household notwithstanding. So there's a bit more than a lost teenager for Anna to find; she has to solve a murder. This is well told, with particularly strong characters—note well Quez, of prodigious size and appetite and tender sensitivities. My only complaint is the ending, which is rushed and inadequately prepared for.

A novel of almost unbearable tension, of cliffhanger after cliffhanger, is George Foy's *Coaster* (Viking, \$16.95). John Penrose is not your typical captain of a British coastal freighter. He's well educated, married to the daughter of a banker, and could have succeeded in the financial world. But the sea runs in his veins, so he bought half of the *Witch of Fraddam*. Then the ship, under his command and loaded with coal slurry, goes down in a storm. Sabotage seems likely; insurance coverage is denied, and lawsuits descend on him for 13

million pounds. Why is Lloyd's, against all sense and precedent, refusing to honor its insurance policy? A newsman friend of Penrose who inquires dies. Penrose is brutally attacked in Holland. From here his situation deteriorates.

Reginald Hill's *An April Shroud* (Foul Play, \$15.95) waited eleven years from its British appearance to arrive here, but it's worth the wait. It's a Dalziel and Pascoe story, but mostly we have Dalziel—fat, coarse, unexpectedly horny, and even vulnerable—on vacation for the first time in years. After seeing Pascoe off married, Dalziel climbs aboard his car for a tour of backroads Lincolnshire, which is awash with heavy rains. He stalls on a flooded road, his car having not been taught to swim, and by way of a waterborne funeral procession finds himself in Lake House. This is a deteriorating pile occupied by the bonnie Mrs. Bonnie Fielding and a curious collection of family and associates. Mrs. Fielding, just shorn of husband via a bizarre accident, invites Dalziel to stay on till the world—and his car—dries out. Strange doings are afoot, and Dalziel, disguised as a non-policeman in some other cop's beat, is right in the middle of it. Rich of atmosphere and character is this savory novel.

Barbara Moore's debut, *The Doberman Wore Black* (1983), was excellent, and so is *The Wolf Whispered Death* (St Martin's, \$15.95), which brings back veteri-

narian Gordon Christy and ventures into Tony Hillerman territory. Sam Benally, a Christy friend and Navajo Indian, asks Gordon for help. A man has been killed near an Indian reservation in New Mexico: his throat was ripped out, apparently by a huge dog or wolf, and Indian superstitions have been excited, centering upon Sam's family. Christy is not entirely welcomed by the mix of cultures, by the state and tribal authorities, but he plays a key role in dealing with murder and with the theft of Hopi idols. Moore ably integrates Indian lore and tradition and people to produce an absorbing tale.

Robert Barnard takes a cynical view of politicians and a somewhat more hopeful view of the electorate in *Political Suicide* (Scribners, \$13.95). James Partridge, Member of Parliament, seems to have drowned himself in the Thames. Case closed, or nearly so. Superintendent Sutcliffe, weeks short of retirement, wonders why so worthy a man as Partridge proves so short of mourners. As a valedictory to his career, the superintendent prowls the district that elected Partridge, where now a hotly contested by-election is being held to replace him.

Sutcliffe pops up here and there, observing and probing and catalyzing, getting to know the people who might have wanted Partridge dead. Not Barnard in best form—none of these folk comes fully alive—but certainly well done.

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a **NEW "Irish" Ohara story by**

NAN HAMILTON

The light, delicate temari balls evoked the essence of old Japan for Ohara. He remembered his mother explaining how the noble ladies of the Imperial court had made them by winding colored silk thread around a fabric or peachstone core. Some had been used for throwing games, but later they'd become an art form and pastime, prized for the beauty of their colors and the intricate patterns wound by the glowing silk threads.

Nan Hamilton's latest novel about "Irish" Ohara of the L.A.P.D., The Shape of Fear, has just been published by Dodd, Mead . . .

MASUGI'S FINAL MASTERPIECE

by NAN HAMILTON

Overnight Hiro Masugi's art store had jumped from obscurity to a center of attention. The small neighborhood shopping center where it was located was crowded for the first time in its existence. Curious spectators stood behind the yellow tapes that cordoned off the immediate area of the store to watch the comings and goings of the police. The arrival of the coroner's van caused a brief stir, as did the detective who seemed unaware of the crowd as he stood looking at Masugi's shop window.

They knew the old man had been murdered. Mrs. Otani from the bakery, bringing him tea and a fresh baked roll as she always did, had found the door to the shop unlatched and his body sprawled on the floor.

Uniformed officers kept urging the crowd to disperse, but nobody

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moved. They wanted to see the body brought out. So far, the mystique of police investigation had been much less exciting than on TV.

At least the Japanese detective in charge seemed to be well cast for his role. He was tall and muscular, with a strong, good-looking face. Those in the front row heard a plainclothes officer call him "Irish," which was an odd name for a Japanese. They wondered why he was looking so long at the store window, with its colored temari balls, scrolls, tea sets, and bamboo. There was nothing unusual about it—it hadn't even been smashed.

"Irish" Ohara was staring at the brightly colored temari balls, lost in memory. You rarely saw them now, but his mother had always had a few to decorate the house at New Year's. As a boy, he'd listened, fascinated, to their history. The light, delicate balls evoked the essence of old Japan for him. He remembered his mother explaining how the noble ladies of the Imperial court had made them by winding colored silk thread around a fabric or peachstone core. Some had been used for throwing games, but later they'd become an art form and pastime, prized for the beauty of their colors and the intricate patterns wound by the glowing silk threads.

Coming back to the present, Ohara went into the store now crowded with specialists doing their meticulous work. Keeping out of the way, he made notes of the scene. The open, empty cash register was typical of a stop-and-rob crime, but he couldn't quite buy that. What enterprising burglar would waste time on a small store like Masugi's?

The killing didn't fit that scenario, either. The victim had been shot twice, once in the shoulder and again at close range in the back of the head, execution style. The body lay close to the front door. One arm was extended ahead and the other drawn inward, the hand closed as if holding something.

Masugi was dressed in shirt, trousers, an old sweater, socks. A pair of shoes was tumbled on the floor. It looked as if the old man had been trying to sneak out of his own shop, carrying his shoes in his hand.

The M.E., Ben Strongman this time, was a large, gruff man whose big hands were surprisingly gentle with the unfeeling dead. He looked up at Ohara, whom he knew well. "Got some goodies for you, Irish." He pointed to some plastic bags set carefully on the floor beside him.

"Thanks, Ben," Ohara said. "What do you have?"

"A wallet, small change, several bits of blue thread on the clothes." He held up a plastic bag. "Pretty color, isn't it?"

It was a beautiful, unusual color, Ohara thought, a deep, intense blue.

"He's got the same blue ground into his fingertips." Ben picked up one of the hands. "And look at this—" He pointed to fine, indented lines on the fingers and thumb. "I can't imagine what would do that."

Neither could Ohara. "What else?"

Ben held up another plastic bag. "A piece of crumpled newspaper that was jammed into his pocket. Then there was this." The M.E. handed Ohara a worn black-leather notebook. "Maybe you can read it, Irish, I can't."

The writing was in Japanese and appeared to be some sort of technical record.

"You might as well take these now," the M.E. said, and handed over a receipt for Ohara to sign.

"What time do you think it happened, Ben?"

"Probably between eleven and twelve last night."

Not much help, Ohara thought. The center would have been deserted then. "The position of the left arm looks odd, doesn't it?" he said, indicating the squarish shape formed by the arm and hand.

Ben stood up. "Does to me, too. As if he'd been carrying something fairly large. Another thing—one shot is bang up against the skull, unusual for a stop-and-rob killing. Well, making guesses is your job, Irish. I'll take him away when you're ready." The M.E. picked up his bag and headed toward the door.

Ohara knelt beside the body. Poor old soul, the way his knee was drawn up and his hand stretched out looked as if he'd still tried to crawl away after the first shot in the shoulder. The hand was blue-veined and marked with the brown spots of age, but the long, slim artist's fingers still held a sense of strength and life. The body looked frail, typical of so many old people who didn't eat enough. Like most Japanese, Ohara had an ingrained respect for the elderly. For them, at least, death should come with peace and dignity, not this way. With a sigh, he stood up and told the coroner's people they could take the body, his expressionless face giving no hint of his angry sense of outrage.

As he turned away, he noticed the crime-scene artist, a pretty red-haired girl, who stood looking at a display case against the wall. He went over to see what held her interest. The shelves held a collection

of bamboo work, netsuke, and kokeshi, the delightful wooden dolls and animals originally carved by the farmers of Japan.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" she said with a smile.

"Yes," Ohara agreed. Even his untrained eye could see that the work was exceptional, much finer than the usual import stuff.

The girl picked up a piece and showed him the signature on the bottom. "That old man did all of them—all these different styles and crafts."

Ohara studied the piece she had given him, a carved owl on a tree stump that seemed almost alive. He ran his fingers gently over the ruffled feathers, cut paper-thin from a single piece of wood.

The girl sighed. "You don't find craftsmen like this much any more, particularly one who can master more than one technique. Look at those scrolls, and the calligraphy. In Japan he might have been named a National Treasure."

"He was that good?" Ohara asked.

"That good. Well, on with the job." The girl smiled and went to the back room to finish her sketches.

Ohara set the owl back on the shelf wondering why an artist that good was scratching out a living in a place like this. Maybe the old man was a drug dealer. A small store like this one would be a good setup. He made a note to check with Narcotics, then moved on to the back room. "Anything interesting?" he asked one of the forensic team.

"Miscellaneous prints in the other room, as you'd expect," the man said. "Two definite sets in here. One belongs to the victim, the other is a woman's. The woman's prints superimpose others on the cash register, too."

"A woman's?" Ohara was surprised. The preliminary report from the other tenants of the shopping center was that Masugi's wife had been in the hospital with a fatal illness for almost two years.

"Yeah, and some long black hairs. You wouldn't think it at his age." The technician grinned and began packing up his gear.

Ohara didn't return the grin. "Any drug cache?"

"Not so much as an aspirin. But there's some stuff that looks like herbs. We'll check it."

Ohara surveyed the room where Masugi had lived. It was divided into living quarters and work area. The living quarters were extremely sparse, furnished with an old armchair, which had been pushed in front of the back door, a table and two wooden chairs, a futon sleeping mattress, and some bookshelves. A curtained alcove

served as lavatory and closet. There was also a two-burner stove and small refrigerator. Ohara opened it and found a dish of vegetables and rice, and a half eaten takeout dinner from someplace called Louie's. "Any prints on this box?" Ohara asked.

The investigator nodded. "A woman's, near as I can tell."

The entire right side of the room was taken up with a workbench, kiln, drying racks, and shelves full of surprisingly sophisticated craft materials. A wastebasket was filled with scraps of some fine wood. Fishing them out and fitting them roughly together, Ohara saw they made a shape similar in dimension to the odd position of the victim's left arm. Had he been carrying a box made of this wood? If so, whoever had killed him must have taken it. He decided to take the pieces of wood to Ben Strongman to see if the dimensions matched.

He needed more information on the victim and decided to start with the woman from the bakery who'd found the body. He left Masugi's and went next door, where the girl behind the counter told him Mrs. Otani was in the back room. She proved to be a little sparrow of a woman, with an aura of quiet strength. Although her eyes were puffed with weeping, she was arranging a tray of red bean cakes. Ohara found himself remembering the sweet, rich taste he'd loved as a boy.

Mrs. Otani barely looked at his I.D., then said. "Sit down. We'll have tea while we talk." She hadn't missed his look at the bean cakes. "Help yourself to one of those," she said, and went to make the tea.

He ate three of them as he sipped the fragrant, slightly bitter tea, which made a perfect contrast.

Mrs. Otani was able to tell him quite a bit about Masugi and his wife, Yoshi. Holding back tears, she described Yoshi's terrible illness and Masugi's struggle to give her the best of care. "I don't know how he's done it. You know what hospitals cost these days."

"I don't imagine the store made much money," Ohara said.

"Very little," she replied. "But Mas worked every minute making things to sell to some Beverly Hills galleries. Swanson's was one. He was very good, you know. But the galleries couldn't buy enough. He was getting desperate until, luckily, he found a rich client. Mas told me the man shipped all over the world and paid well."

"What was his name?" Ohara took out his notebook.

"I think it was Silver—something like that. I saw him once or twice when he came to the shop. He was a tall man, with white hair

brushed back from his face. He had a big nose and a small, mean-looking mouth."

Ohara blessed Mrs. Otani's sharp eyes as he wrote down the details.

"In fact," she went on, "he came there shortly before Mas was killed. He brought a girl with him. She stayed on and worked in the store. I think she even slept there. I know she had food sent in from a takeout place. She wouldn't let anybody talk to Mas—not me or anyone else. She said he was working and couldn't be disturbed. Took the food I brought over for him, though."

Ohara felt a tinge of excitement. "Can you describe her?"

Mrs. Otani did, as succinctly as she had described Silver, ending with: "She looked Japanese, but I don't think she was."

Ohara thanked her and asked which hospital was caring for Mrs. Masugi.

Mrs. Otani told him and sighed. "Sometimes she's aware and sometimes she isn't. I wish she didn't have to know."

Ohara agreed with her. He'd delivered these sad messages many times, but this one would be more difficult than most.

After leaving the bakery, he went to the coroner's office. When Ohara showed Ben the pieces of wood, the M.E. was interested. "Looks like the cutout part measures the size the arm was folded to," he said. "I'll check it out."

Back at his own desk at the station, Ohara spread out the things he'd found on Masugi's body. The wallet contained a few dollars, a bank book, and a safety-deposit key. Checking on Masugi's finances was crucial and Ohara went about getting a warrant. Next he made an appointment with the manager of Masugi's bank, then with the owner of Swanson's Art Gallery. He was running short of time, so he left the notebook for later.

On his way out, Ohara stopped at Narcotics and asked about Masugi and Silver. They had nothing on either, but said they would ask around on the street and get back to him. Then he tried Records with both names and came up blank. It was time to pick up the warrant and get over to the bank.

As it turned out, Masugi's account was minimal, but his safety-deposit box contained about three thousand dollars in cash. Obviously the old man was into something he didn't want known.

Ohara's next call was at the hospital. There was just a chance Masugi had told his wife something that would help. He would decide what to tell her when he saw her condition . . .

The hospital office directed him to the nurses' desk on the fifth floor. When he explained his errand, the head nurse, a large, comfortable-looking black woman, was shocked.

"How terrible. Well, at least she was spared that."

"What do you mean?" Ohara asked her.

"Mrs. Masugi died this morning. We phoned her husband because she had been asking for him. Some woman answered the phone and said he couldn't be reached."

"Did this woman identify herself?" Ohara asked the nurse.

"No. She just said she was Mr. Masugi's assistant. We had hoped she was a relative. Is there anyone to take care of things?"

"We'll see to it," Ohara said, and after thanking her went down to the business office, where he found that after the first few months Masugi had caught up his arrears and paid the staggering bills regularly, always in cash.

"We offered to transfer his wife to County Hospital," the accountant said, "but he wouldn't hear of it. There's a small remaining charge. Will the estate cover it? And what about the body?"

The brusque questions irritated Ohara, but he realized the girl was just doing her job. "There are funds to cover everything," he said. "Call this funeral home."

He gave her the name of a Japanese mortuary. He knew that was what the old couple would have wanted. One way or another, he'd see that they got it.

Swanson's Art Gallery was next on his list. There he learned that they used to buy Masugi's work, but he'd brought them nothing for over a year.

"I think he turned to some other work." Mr. Swanson, the owner, was genuinely distressed. "Masugi was a rare artist," he said, "a master of the old techniques, but he always used them in new ways." He had never heard of Silver, but suggested two other places where Ohara might inquire.

Both turned out to be dead ends. By the time he was through, it was late so Ohara went home, knowing that the relaxation of an evening with his family, if he didn't get called out, would refresh and sharpen his thinking. Consciously, he put his unanswered questions on the back burner of his mind. He had found in the past that his subconscious mind stayed on the job and frequently came up with some good ideas on its own. He wished, though, that he didn't have this sense of urgency, the feeling that there was more to come.

The next morning he had to be in court on another case, so it wasn't until afternoon that he could again deal with the problem of Masugi's murder.

Back at his desk, he turned off the bustle of noise around him and concentrated first on the crumpled bit of newspaper. It did look as if Masugi had simply used it to wipe the blue dye off his hands and then absentmindedly stuffed it in his pocket. Flattening it out, he saw it was a notice of a special exhibit of antique Japanese art objects being held at the new Japanese wing of the Imperial Museum.

Many of the pieces belonging to collectors and museums had never been loaned abroad before. The opening was today, beginning with a preview for distinguished collectors, the mayor, and museum patrons. —Possibly the old man had intended to go.

Ohara took up the notebook and began to go through it. Though he read Japanese fluently, he was confronted with Masugi's personal shorthand. Some of the pages were lists of supplies, others were descriptions of experiments with accompanying sketches of details. Each one was dated over a period of the past two years. There was a list of the amounts he'd paid to the hospital as well.

As Ohara turned the pages, a folded paper fell out onto the desk. It was the torn-out page of what appeared to be a catalogue. The paper was yellowed with age. At the bottom, where the page had been torn, he could just piece together the words "Kyoto Imperial Museum." The torn-out section described a temari ball from the Edo period. Dimensions, pattern, and colors were given, with particular emphasis on a certain rare blue. Ohara reached for the bag of blue threads and took one out, winding it thoughtfully around his finger. When he removed it, a thin, circled indentation lined his fingertip similar to those on Masugi's fingers. Now he knew what had caused them.

Ohara stared at the page from the catalogue. This had to be one of the Imperial treasures shown only once a year to selected visitors.

He went back to the notebook and found what he'd expected —sketches of a pattern of silk threads similar to those described in the catalogue. There was also a sketch of what must be the inside halves of the ball, with each half showing a hollow core. There was no mention of this in Masugi's printed notes. Perhaps he had been experimenting with a different core. Could the old man actually have been planning to fake an Imperial treasure? If he was, if Masugi

was an art forger, it would explain the large sums of money he'd obtained.

Idly, Ohara riffled through the rest of the notebook—stopping at another page. It contained two sketches, but this time both of them were faces. One of them was a girl with a round oriental face, heavy brows, high cheekbones, and a small scar on the right temple. Her hair was drawn back into a tight ponytail. The second sketch was of a man, leonine in appearance with brushed-back white hair, thin lips, and a jutting nose. The face was somewhat plump, the eyes small under brows that tufted up, stopping short of the end of the eye socket.

Ohara wondered why Masugi had sketched the faces, apparently hurriedly, in his workbook? With a feeling of excitement, he went to the Fraud section to see Cal Walker, a veteran with an amazing memory for faces.

"Murder suspects, you say. Well, the man's one of the slickest con artists going. Done time. Nothing on him lately. His name's Leo Spitz—a.k.a. half a dozen other names. Silver is a new one."

"Would art fraud be his style?" Ohara asked.

"Big money is his style."

"This is big. Anything on the girl?"

"I don't know her," Cal shrugged. "But if she works with Leo, she's probably the enforcer. He uses somebody else for any hard stuff, particularly if it comes to murder."

Ohara thanked Cal and started back to his office, his mind double-timing as he put the pieces together—a master artist desperate for money, and a master con man into art fraud. There could only be one reason they'd kill the goose that laid their golden eggs. Masugi must have been running out on them.

The thought made him feel better somehow. The old man might have committed fraud, but Ohara couldn't think of him as a criminal. He sat down at his desk, wondering how he could turn his guesswork into facts. First, he'd better have Mrs. Otani I.D. the sketches as the people she'd seen. But before he left to see her, he called the M.E. and asked about the pieces of wood.

"They could have been from a box fourteen inches square," Ben said. "The dimensions fit the space the victim's arm was curved around." This confirmed Ohara's idea that the old man had the temari ball with him when he'd made a run for it and the girl, who had probably shot him, had taken it.

What next? He stared at the crumpled, blue-stained newspaper

clipping about the Japanese antiques exhibit at the museum and realized he'd been overlooking something. The exhibit could have been Silver's target, especially if there was a chance any of the pieces might be sold.

Ohara picked up the phone and called Kanjitsu Tanaka, an old friend, who was director of the Japanese collection.

Tanaka greeted him cordially, but said he couldn't possibly see him until tomorrow.

"Tanaka san," Ohara said, "we've uncovered an art scam in connection with a murder, and the museum's exhibit could be a target."

"Impossible—we're too careful," Tanaka said stiffly.

"Have you inspected all the exhibits yourself?"

There was a short silence. "All but a few that arrived late. My staff took care of them, and they're experts. I'm sorry, but I can't take time to discuss it now. Distinguished guests are arriving shortly for a viewing, and there's a reception to follow."

"Do you have a temari ball in the exhibit?" Ohara persisted.

"I—yes, we do," Tanaka said slowly. Then, "Come at four o'clock. I think you're wrong, but I'll listen."

Ohara left immediately to see Mrs. Otani. The bakery was on the way to the museum. She recognized the sketches immediately.

"Do you remember anything more?" Ohara asked.

"That girl stayed all the time," she said, "even at night. I saw the big armchair made up as a bed one evening when I brought Mas some soup. He came out to thank me that time. She didn't like it, and never left us alone. I couldn't understand why." Ohara thanked her for her help, and left.

Tanaka was waiting impatiently in his office. He was a rotund little man, with a high expanse of balding forehead underlined by a pair of dark tortoiseshell glasses. He snatched the glasses off as he rose to greet Ohara, then blurted, "The exhibits are all in place, but I have looked at each one again without disturbing anything. I find nothing suspicious. The temari ball is perfect—very rare. The provenance is well documented and the donor a well known collector."

"Was it brought here in person?" Ohara asked.

"No, it came special delivery yesterday. He had written to us to expect it."

"Was it in a special case about fourteen inches square?"

Tanaka looked surprised. "Yes, a fine, silk-lined case of cryptomeria wood."

Ohara told him the story of Masugi's murder and laid the notebook and the plastic bags of evidence on the desk. Tanaka picked up the one with the blue threads. "The color—it's the same." With shaking hands, he took the notebook and began to leaf through the pages. "These are records of experiments in lacquer, glazes, clay— Here's one on aging color. Ways to age bronze. I can't believe this!"

Tanaka continued turning pages until he came to the sketches of the two faces. "This girl, she's familiar. I don't know the man. Why would he sketch them?"

"If I'm right," Ohara said, "he wanted to identify them."

Then, as Tanaka flipped over to another page of notes, the cutout piece of catalogue fell into his hand. His face whitened as he read the description of the Imperial temari ball and compared it with Masugi's notes, measurements, and comments. "They're the same," he said, "except for this hollow core. I don't understand that. It's unheard of—"

The telephone rang, and at the same time they heard the sound of car doors slamming outside. As Tanaka picked up the phone, Ohara went to the office window overlooking the museum entrance. Two limousines, one with a flag on its bonnet, were unloading passengers. A tall man, his hawk profile familiar from the newspapers and television newscasts, stood talking to the mayor and other dignitaries. They were encircled by a group of dark-suited men, whose alert eyes scoured the area around them with professional sharpness. Other cars were coming up the drive.

"I have to go!" Tanaka was already at the door. "The prince—er, our distinguished guests must not be kept waiting."

Ohara was across the room in quick strides. "Where's the temari ball?" he demanded.

"We needn't bother with that now," Tanaka said. "I'll send one of the girls to remove it."

"No!" Ohara stopped him. "No one is to touch it. Tell me where it is!"

"In one of the last sections," Tanaka said, surprised at Ohara's intensity. "I'm not sure just where—" He turned to his secretary. "Ellie, find the location of the temari ball for Detective Ohara. I have to get downstairs."

Grasping the young woman's arm, Ohara hurried her down the stairs ahead of Tanaka. "Tell me where it is," he demanded.

"In a section in back," she said as he rushed her down the stairs. They skirted the group of guests assembling in the foyer and ducked into the exhibition rooms. These had been designed as a flowing arrangement of semicircles, each one leading into another. You couldn't see from one to the next until you rounded each corner.

Here and there, girls in smart maroon uniforms were stationed as guards or guides. "If I could find Asha," Ellie said, "she'd know exactly where the temari ball is. She set it up."

Ohara stopped dead. "Who's Asha?"

"Asha's one of our student assistants. She volunteered to come back from her vacation early to help set up the last of the exhibits. The temari ball was one of them."

"What does she look like?"

The secretary shrugged. "Sort of oriental-looking. She could be pretty if she didn't wear her hair in a severe ponytail. She's—"

"Ellie," Ohara said calmly but with a look on his face that turned her cold. "Get to Tanaka and tell him to keep the guests in the first section, no matter what he has to do! Tell him there may be a bomb in the temari ball, but not to panic anyone. Then get to a phone and call this number." He scribbled on a page of his notebook. "They'll send a bomb squad just in case."

He turned and headed toward the next section, scanning the exhibits and the faces of each girl attendant, not daring to run lest he alarm his quarry. The face he was looking for was nowhere to be seen until, ahead of him, he saw a girl in a maroon uniform rounding the circular wall of the section ahead. Her long ponytail swung against her shoulders.

Ohara hurried toward her, but when he reached the next section she had disappeared into the one farther on. Moving after her as silently and quickly as he could, he caught up with her—standing in front of a case containing a magnificent temari ball, a small deadly masterpiece iridescent under the spotlight, its rich blue color wound with gold.

Oblivious to everything else, the girl stared at it, her lips moving silently, her clenched fist raised above her head, the fingers of her other hand delicately resting near a small button on her lapel.

Suddenly that hand was pulled away and brought sharply up behind her back. Lightning fast, she turned to face her attacker, her upraised fist snaking inside her jacket for a gun. But fast as she was, the iron-hard hand that chopped at her throat was faster. She

slumped against Ohara without a sound and the gun dropped to the floor.

Ohara carried her unconscious body gingerly to the hall, where a door opened to the street. Propping the door open on its metal glide, he carefully removed the detonator button from her lapel and set it on the ground outside. This done, he cuffed the girl's hands behind her, then went back for the temari ball.

He had no idea how volatile the substance in the core might be, but the voices of the guests were coming closer. Tanaka had not been successful in holding them back or else he had not taken the message seriously. Ohara knew he couldn't wait for the bomb squad.

He wiped his sweaty palms against his trousers, then carefully opened the glass case that contained the ball. With infinite care, he lifted its gold hanging cord from the suspending stand and, steadying the ball with his other hand, held his breath as he slowly turned and started for the hallway. One misstep could bring disaster—he had no idea what the range of the explosive was.

Sweat stood out on his forehead by the time he made it outside the opened door. The bomb squad's vehicle had just pulled up and the men in protective gear were getting out. "Over here!" Ohara shouted. Only when he had surrendered the lethal work of art did his hands begin to shake. He watched a member of the squad, carrying it as he had, one slow step at a time, to the van.

When it was safely inside, Ohara became aware of the deep, regular beat of his own heart. He shut his eyes a moment, letting the tension flow from his body. It was over. They had the girl and they would soon have Silver. He pictured the beautiful, deadly temari ball now enclosed in the metal box. Masugi's last masterpiece would be blown to bits, its beauty lost forever. He had a feeling the old man would have wanted it that way.

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a **NEW** short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

"Hello, old chap," Derek said. "Too silly that we shouldn't talk, don't you think? Let me get you a drink."

If Gavin Hobhouse had been what used to be called the injured party, it is likely that he would have rejected this advance. A situation where both men nodded frostily to each other when their paths happened to cross would clearly have been much more to his conventional taste. As the guilty party, however, it would certainly be churlish, not to say unChristian, to reject the hand of friendship, or at least of reconciliation . . .

THE INJURED PARTY

by **ROBERT BARNARD**

Derek Mattingley was not sure of the appropriate behavior for a husband on the death of an ex-wife. No doubt one of the with-it etiquette books had a section on it. Luckily, mourning itself has practically passed away, so delicate questions of full- or half-mourning did not present themselves. A sober suit was all that could be expected, and as a Lloyd's broker Derek wore a sober suit every day of his life. Similarly with his behavior, which in working hours was habitually tinged with gravity, so that he had no difficulty in shaking his head sadly when anyone brought the subject up, or in offering remarks like, "It's Gavin I feel sorry for—only two years married." With closer friends he ventured: "I often wondered whether she was entirely well when she was married to me." Then he would dismiss the matter with another shake of the head: "It's a sad business."

Inwardly, of course, he was over the moon with delight.

He had been married to Anne-Marie for seven years. She had

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cooked well, both for him and for the little dinner parties which Derek rather went in for. She had looked decorative at the cocktail parties they regularly threw, had turned eyes in the stalls at Covent Garden, and at Chichester, where they sometimes drove to take in a play at festival time. Sometimes on holiday—Sardinia, as often as not, or the dear old South of France, which Derek always said you still couldn't beat—she had looked perfectly stunning. Derek regarded her as an undoubted asset.

Which made her announcement that she was leaving him such a hideous blow. It was all so damned unexpected. She had said she was just an adjunct to his business career. Well, why hadn't she said so before? And why had she made no bones about living off the proceeds of that business career? She said he had no interest in her as a person. Good heavens, what nonsense! He'd married her, hadn't he? How could she say he wasn't interested in her as a person?

But the worst was to come.

"Doesn't it mean anything," he had demanded, "that we've had seven years together day and night?"

"Are you referring to bed?" she had asked. "Well, there was never much of interest in *that* department, was there?"

They were words from which Derek Mattingley flinched, as if struck. What had been wrong with their sex? It had seemed perfectly all right to him. What had she been expecting that he hadn't given her? And where had she formed her standards of comparison?

Part of the answer to that last question soon became obvious. She was leaving him, she said, for Gavin Hobhouse.

Derek really had to sit down and think who Gavin Hobhouse was. He barely knew the man, though it was true he had been to dinner. That was when Derek had thought he might be useful in the matter of National and Regional shares, but Hobhouse hadn't responded to his prompting—in fact, he had hardly said a word all evening.

That, Anne-Marie said, was because they were already going to bed together. Gavin was a man of old-fashioned probity, of deeply conservative principles. He was embarrassed by the situation and took refuge in taciturnity.

"The strong, silent type?" inquired Derek satirically.

"Well, yes, he is, rather. Strong, simple emotions."

"His conservative principles didn't stop him breaking up *my* hearth and home, did they?"

"The fire was *out*, the home was a shell," said Anne-Marie. "Otherwise I don't think he ever would have spoken."

Gavin apparently had been an ex-guardsmen, but was now something in the City, as Derek—when he had racked his brains—knew. He was, from all he could learn, just as Anne-Marie described him: simple, passionate, old-fashioned in his morality, strict in his standards. “She’d be well advised not to play around while she’s married to *him*,” said one of Derek’s friends in the City. Then, with a sideways glance at Derek, he added: “But then, perhaps she won’t want to.”

Before Derek shunted this particular stockbroker over to his list of ex-friends, he asked casually:

“Jealous, would you say?”

“As a tiger, I’d guess. That’s just an opinion, of course. Until now he’s never had anyone much to be jealous about.”

“Quite,” said Derek.

After the separation, Derek rebuilt his life—or, rather, took steps to ensure the smooth continuation of his old life in all essentials. In some respects, very little needed to be done. The cleaning lady came in as before, and now and then left him a cold meal or something that could easily be heated up in the oven. Mostly Derek ate out. The laundryman called, and Derek did a large shop once a fortnight at the local supermarket, just as he had in Anne-Marie’s time. He found a very reliable Algerian couple, students, who would come in to cook for dinner parties or do the necessary at any other drinks-and-chat gatherings Derek might arrange.

Life went on really very satisfactorily, except that sometimes in the middle of the night he would awake sweating and panting, and sometimes crying out with what he recognized was rage. Luckily, there was no one in the house to hear him. He got in the habit, on these disturbing occasions, of going straight to the bathroom and taking a shower. In the mornings, he was his usual cool self.

It was some time before he made any approach to Gavin Hobhouse. To move too quickly would certainly arouse in that conventional, simple soul either distaste or suspicion. It would have, he knew, to be a fortuitous and spontaneous coming together. What in fact happened was that one lunchtime, in a City pub, Derek saw in the glass behind the bar that Gavin was standing by his shoulder in the one o’clock scrum. Derek eased himself round.

“Hello, old chap,” he said. “Too silly that we shouldn’t talk, don’t you think? Let me get you a drink.”

If Gavin Hobhouse had been what used to be called the injured party, it is likely that he would have rejected this advance. A sit-

uation where both men nodded frostily to each other when their paths happened to cross would clearly have been much more to his conventional taste. As the guilty party, however, it would certainly be churlish, not to say unChristian, to reject the hand of friendship, or at least of reconciliation. He tried to keep the stiffness out of his voice when he said:

"Scotch and water, please."

He backed his way out of the scrum and got them a place by a little ledge on a far wall, and there he waited for Derek and for the inevitable conversation that must ensue without any obvious signs of distaste on his handsome face.

"How is Anne-Marie, anyway," said Derek, coming back with the drinks.

"Oh, fine. She's fine," said Gavin Hobhouse.

"Good. Good. You know, though I didn't think so at the time, I realize now that what happened was obviously the best thing in the long run. Common enough thing to happen these days, after all—what? Easy to make a mistake in one's first marriage. Only sensible thing is to cut your losses and get out."

It wasn't at all how Gavin Hobhouse viewed marriage, but in the circumstances he could only murmur, "Right." Derek, on this first meeting, wisely turned the talk to the current scandals in the banking world, and to the position of the Governor of the Bank of England in them. It was only as they were getting ready to go back to their respective offices that Derek obliquely returned to the personal matters that lay between them.

"Ever see anything of Anne-Marie's mother?" he asked, buttoning up the jacket of his pinstripe suit.

"Oh, yes. We went up to stay at Penstone a couple of months ago."

"Wonderful woman," said Derek with enthusiasm. "A real legend in her own lifetime."

Anne-Marie's mother had had a raffish career, which had begun when she was a member of the Princess Margaret set back in the Fifties, and which, apart from various flings, had brought her no less than four husbands. She was currently Lady Crawley, with a country seat and a national reputation.

"We always got on like a house on fire," said Derek as they threaded their way through the mob of City drinkers. "You can see where Anne-Marie got her—charm."

That evening, as he sat watching Channel 4 news and forked

absentmindedly into his mouth a shepherd's pie that his daily had left ready for him, his meditations added spice to the humdrum fare. Clearly he was not going to be able to talk to Gavin Hobhouse too often. Any suspicion that he was waylaying him, cultivating him in any way, would be counterproductive. Conversation between them had to be very occasional, and apparently as fortuitous as that first meeting had been. Derek decided that his first priority must be to find out what Gavin Hobhouse did in his lunch hour. No doubt he had various haunts—pubs, cafés, restaurants—depending on the dictates of his digestion. He, Derek, went to a variety of places. He was quite willing to add to their number.

Thus he had waved across the room to Gavin in Alberto's in Curtin Street a couple of times before, three months after their first meeting, they actually were seated close enough to talk. By a combination of planning and good luck, he turned into the little eating place just two minutes after Gavin and found that the table next to his was the only one vacant.

They greeted each other very much as two City gentlemen will when they have a definite but limited acquaintanceship. They swapped odd remarks about the state of the economy and feeling in the CBI while Derek read the menu and ordered. They discovered (not very surprisingly, since Derek always winkled out Gavin's opinion first) that they felt pretty much the same about these topics. When Derek saw a couple standing waiting for a table, he suggested that he move over to Gavin's—which was unusual since he was neither generous by nature nor courteous, except within convention.

"Silly to take up two tables," he said, moving his things over. "It gets pretty crowded in here."

"Yes, it does," said Gavin, eating perhaps a shade faster.

"Used to go to the Coq d'Or at lunchtimes—specially if Anne-Marie was up for the day. She loves French cooking, doesn't she? But either it's gone downhill or it's not somewhere to go on your own. I prefer this place now."

"Anne-Marie's more into English cooking at the moment," said Gavin, apparently to keep the thing going.

"Really? *Really?* Not that she wasn't always perfectly good at the traditional English while we were married— I suppose that would be cousin Simon's influence, wouldn't it?"

"Couldn't say. I believe she has had some recipes from him, yes. She's been talking about a book."

"Oh, jolly good. I always said she ought to go into the cookbook business. See much of Simon, does she?"

"Oh, yes—now and again. He comes over to us, or she goes over to him."

"They're practically brother and sister, aren't they? Naturally, since they were brought up together. I used to think that if mother-in-law hadn't dumped Anne-Marie onto her sister during one of her grand passions, those two would probably have got married. I *like* Simon, though, don't you?"

"Yes, very much. —Though I haven't seen much of him."

"Some don't, you know—like him, I mean. It's that golden-boy air he has about him. That look of being the Rupert Brooke *de nos jours*. That air of playing gentlemanly cricket on the green, taking crumpets at the vicarage, with croquet afterward in the dusk, that feeling that there must be some elderly novelist somewhere sighing after him and writing him passionate little notes. I always have that feeling about Simon, don't you?"

Gavin left a moment's silence.

"Well, no—I hadn't thought of him quite like that."

"Sorry. Was I being too ridiculously fanciful? Well, certainly one thing we never would have predicted for him would be that he would end up owning and running a restaurant, even one as special as the Old Watermill. Awfully useful for Anne-Marie, anyway, if he supplies her with recipes. I'm glad she's seeing a lot of him. She probably gives him some kind of stable base. I think that's what he needed during all this racketing around he used to do."

"Well, er—we'll hope so."

"Yes, it *is* difficult to think of Anne-Marie as a stable base, isn't it?" said Derek with a light-hearted laugh. "But I think you may well find that that's how it works itself out with those two."

He looked guilelessly into Gavin Hobhouse's face, with its faint, bewildered frown.

Derek was gratified that the next time he and Gavin talked, it was Gavin who made the approach. They were at one of these launching parties for something financial, an early-evening affair to which Gavin had brought Anne-Marie. Derek and his ex-wife kissed and exchanged inanities, and then went their separate ways.

Normally Derek would have downed a couple of drinks and then made off, for these were not the sort of functions that anyone but an incurable soak would stay at for long. But almost from the be-

ginning he felt that Gavin's eyes were on him, whatever their respective positions in the room and whoever they were talking to. Before long, he made an excuse to the incredibly boring City type with whom he had been making incredibly boring conversation and went over to the table of incredibly boring light refreshments. He was helping himself to a triangle of bread with cream cheese and chopped ham on top when a shadow across the light made him realize that Gavin was at his elbow.

Gavin, when he *did* talk about personal matters, came to them at once.

"I say, Derek, I wonder if I could ask you something?"

"Yes, of course, old chap. So long as I'm not bound to silence by company policy."

"Oh, it's not professional. It's—well, I wondered if Anne-Marie and Simon saw a lot of each other while you were married."

Derek put down his savory and turned to face Gavin with an expression of great concern on his face.

"Oh, I say, old chap—really, I blame myself for this. No, really. I never dreamed—I can see what has happened. I've been putting silly ideas into your head."

"No, it's just—"

"Yes, I have. I can see it. Well, just don't think any more about it. You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick entirely."

"Yes, but did she?"

"Yes, of course she did. And she'll go on seeing him frequently till the end of her days unless they have some kind of lo— of family tiff. They're bound up with each other, always have been since they were children. But there's nothing *in* it, nothing of the sort that you've been imagining."

Gavin stood silent for a moment, then muttered:

"She certainly does see a lot of him."

"Of course she does. But you know what an open-hearted girl she is. When she gives, she gives entirely. I mean, look at her now—"

He waved his hand to the far corner of the room. Anne-Marie was standing with a man, he stiff-backed and fair-haired, she with her face close to his, for she was short-sighted, looking up intently, laughing at his jokes, giving him the feeling that he was, for that moment, the only man she cared about in the world. Stupid bitch, thought Derek, a spurt of venom seeming to shoot through his veins. You're bringing it on yourself, you silly tart.

"I mean, look at her. Look at the way she gives her all to anyone

she happens to talk to. It's in the blood. Part of her mother's technique, if you ask me. But in her case it doesn't *mean* anything. She probably doesn't know the man from Adam."

"Actually, that's Bruno Kohl," said Gavin stiffly. "Friend of the family."

"There you *are*, you see. Friend of the family. But if you just *saw* them together, in the abstract, so to speak, you'd think—putting the thing bluntly—there was something between them. And with Simon there is the added thing that he *is* practically a brother to her. Remember how often she was ill in childhood, those long periods when she was laid up with that dicky heart of hers. She relied on him for companionship. It's not surprising that they got into the habit of depending on one another."

"No," said Gavin, but after a pause.

"So put the thing clean out of your mind. Good Lord, it's awful to see a happily married chap like you entertaining ideas of that kind. Forget about it entirely."

But Gavin, fortunately, could not do that. The thing about people with few, simple ideas is that the ideas tend to take them over entirely. And the fact was that, as far as Gavin's Victorian ideas about faithfulness and marital exclusivity were concerned, he had violated them by taking Anne-Marie from Derek in the first place. Or Anne-Marie, in particular, had violated them, with his connivance.

Now Derek and Gavin found that they met fairly frequently at lunchtime. At every meeting Derek noticed with satisfaction fresh care-lines around the eyes, along the forehead. And the eyes wandered insecurely around the room, and the mouth seemed slacker. Every time they met, the subject of Anne-Marie hung in the air from the first moment, and every time it in the end came up—was brought up by Gavin.

For one or two meetings, Derek kept up the notion that he was quite sure there was nothing in Gavin's suspicions. This was the easier to do because he was in fact quite sure that, whatever her relations with other men had been, her love for her cousin Simon was childlike and sisterly. Gradually, though, responding to Gavin's insistent suspicion, he shifted to a new tack, so that before long the suspicion was accepted between them as fact.

"It's a funny family," Derek would say. "I yield to no one in my

admiration for Lady Crawley. Still, that doesn't mean I'd want to have been one of her four."

Before long that became:

"You can't wonder Anne-Marie is as she is."

Quite soon, Gavin's watchful eye, ever active at parties, dinners, and other social occasions, would detect other men he was convinced were enjoying Anne-Marie's favors. He would ring home during the day and be distraught if he found his wife not at home, or would detect suspicious noises if she was there. Derek, on their meetings, would be reassuring.

"I'm sure it's more a matter of *manner* rather than there being anything much going on."

Eventually Gavin would cry: "Of course there's something going on! I see how she behaves with these men, don't I?"

"I didn't say there was nothing going on. After all, she deceived me with you, didn't she? I just mean it's not all that *serious*. You've got to learn to take these things a bit more easily, old man. Be relaxed about the whole thing. Because there's nothing going to change her now."

The last time Gavin and Derek met, Anne-Marie's promiscuity was by now an established fact for both of them.

"I can see it bothers you, old man," said Derek, digging into his sorbet, "but you've got to face it, we're living in the Twentieth Century. All the old standards have gone by the board long ago. And, after all, you've still got the major shareholding in her."

"God!" said Gavin, spitting the word out.

"I wouldn't mind betting she still loves you. That's how you must see it. It's something in her nature that makes her as she is, but basically she still loves you in her way. It wasn't like that with us."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, when we were married and she was playing around—and, my God, did she play around!—our marriage was already dead for her. Trouble was, it wasn't dead for me. Though God knows I sometimes wanted *her* dead. Funny to think back on it now, but I did. Desperately. Thought of going out and picking the good old foxglove leaves—"

"Foxglove leaves?"

"Digitalis. Good for the heart in small quantities, fatal for someone like Anne-Marie if she had a hefty dose of it. That was the sort of silly idea I played with, so you can see I've really been through it, too. But in the end you shake down into the situation. Take the line

of 'least said, soonest mended.' In the end, whatever she gets up to is so much water off a duck's back. You'll see, that's how it will be with you."

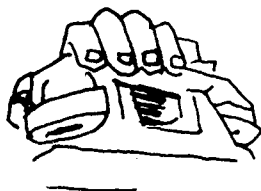
Derek first knew for sure that that was *not* how it was to be with Gavin when he heard of Anne-Marie's death. Ironically, it was her cousin Simon who telephoned him to tell him.

"I suppose it was always on the cards, with that heart of hers," Derek said to him. "Awful for *you*—you two were always so close. And I don't mind telling you, it's a shock for me, too, in spite of it all."

That was early on in the morning, about nine, before he took off for the City. Throughout the day there was a trickle of people who had heard, made the connection, and murmured sympathy. Even in the pub that night someone had heard, and the word went round. Derek downed a couple of shorts, then left. There was a lot of sympathy for him in the saloon bar: it had hit him hard, they said. When he got home, he wondered whether to ring up then. He thought about it for a bit, then decided it would look better if he had slept on it first.

So in fact it was next morning, after breakfast, when he rang up the police and said:

"Look, I know I'm probably being silly, but you see my ex-wife has died, and quite by chance I was talking to her husband one lunch time a few days ago. He'd been having trouble with her, as I did, and I made this silly remark about digitalis— Yes, digitalis. I'm quite sure there's nothing in it, but it's been nagging at me since I heard she'd died and I find I can't get it out of my head. What do you think? *Should* you look into it a bit?"



EQMM READERS AWARD

On May 9th of this year, prior to the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Awards Dinner, Davis Publications held a cocktail party at the Tower Suite in the Time & Life Building to honor the Edgar nominees in the short-story category and to present the first annual EQMM Readers Award to Clark Howard for "Animals," his story voted the most outstanding of all those published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1985. In presenting the award, Publisher Joel Davis pointed out that another story by Mr. Howard, "McCulla's Kid," came in third in the voting. (Lawrence Block's "Like a Bug on a Windshield" was rated second.)

In accepting the award (see photograph on page 99), Clark Howard expressed his appreciation at being selected for what he feels is a very important new award that will set a precedent in the genre.

Now it is time to vote for the second EQMM Readers Award, for the author of the story that had the greatest impact on you of all those you've read in EQMM this year—from the January through this Mid-December issue. (It is the issue date that counts, not when you receive a subscribed copy or pick it up at the newsstand.)

On page 98, write in the name of the story and its author and the issue in which the story appeared. The Indexes in the June and this issue will help refresh your memory if necessary. If you can't recall a story by its title or author, describe the plot as briefly and accurately as you can in the available space.

Vote for one story only and send this page from the magazine as your ballot to the address on page 98 *by December 31*. Photocopies or ballots with more than one choice will be disqualified.

The winning story will be announced in the May 1987 issue. Last year it was announced in the April issue, but that proved to be too much of a hardship for our printer to repeat the problem another year. If you are eager to learn the results of the voting before the May issue goes to subscribers and newsstands, send a standard-size stamped envelope with your request to us at the address below. We will know the results by late January.

My selection for the 1986 EQMM Readers Award is

Mail to: The Editors
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

THANKS TO YOU—A CELEBRATION!



Clark Howard with the first EQMM Readers Award



Photographs by Standard Studios

EQMM editor Eleanor Sullivan; Clark Howard; Joel Davis, publisher of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*



Clark Howard; Roslyn Targ, Mr. Howard's literary agent; Judith Howard; publisher William Targ



Rupert Holmes and Thomas Adcock



Edward D. Hoch



John Lutz



Carleton Carpenter



Dick Francis



Stanley Ellin



George Baxt



Joel Davis; Carol Davis; Mrs. Frederic Dannay; Isaac Asimov;
Janet Asimov

Designed by Sheila Smith

a distinguished ghost story by

ROBERTSON DAVIES

Whenever writers who love their craft get together these days, the name and work of Robertson Davies seem inevitably to come up. The greatly admired Ontario-born author was educated in Canada and at Oxford and once studied acting at the Old Vic, where he was Sir Tyrone Guthrie's literary assistant. He was for twenty years the editor of the Peterborough Examiner and also served as principal book reviewer for the weekly Saturday Night. He has written more than 25 books of fiction and nonfiction and until the spring of 1981 he taught at the University of Toronto, where he was Master of Massey College.

In his Introduction to High Spirits (Penguin Books), the collection of his ghost stories from which "Dickens Digested" was selected, he wrote: "The first uncanny tale I read, when I was ten, was Frankenstein, which terrified me unforgettably and gloriously. None of the film versions, in my opinion, comes near the effect Mary Shelley produces by her special qualities of prose."

He continued: "Although I have read tales of ghosts and the supernatural eagerly all my life I never thought of writing one until I went to Massey College in 1963. The college had a Christmas party for its members and their friends, and some sort of entertainment was needed. There were lots of gifted people to call on—poets and musicians—but I was expected to make a contribution, and I decided on a ghost story. For the eighteen years I was at the college a story was called for every Christmas, and here they are, gathered together, in the hope that other enthusiasts for this sort of tale will enjoy them."

We would like to celebrate Mr. Davies' enchanting tradition with his highly spirited evocation of the ghost of Charles Dickens, himself the creator of ghosts—ghosts who have altered our perception of this holiday season ever since, the Ghosts of Christmas Past, of Christmas Present, and of Christmas To Come . . .

DICKENS DIGESTED

by **ROBERTSON DAVIES**

In this, the centenary of his death, I should like to speak well of Charles Dickens; the literary world has united to do him honor as one of the half dozen foremost geniuses of our great heritage of poetry, drama, and the novel. That I should have to stand before you tonight and direct at that Immortal Memory a charge of—the word sticks in my throat, but it must be given voice—a charge of Vampirism, repels and disgusts me, but when Dickens has cast this hateful shadow across the quadrangle of Massey College, I have no other course.

This is what happened.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity—in short, it was the beginning of the autumn term, and the year was 1969. I met the incoming group of Junior Fellows, and among the thirty-five or so new men were some who immediately attracted my attention—but the subject of my story was not one of these.

No, Tubfast Weatherwax III had nothing about him to draw or hold one's interest; he was a bland young man, quite unremarkable in appearance. Of course, I was familiar with his dossier, which had been thoroughly examined by the Selections Committee of the College. He came to us from Harvard, and he was a young American of distinguished background—as the dynastic number attached to his name at once made clear. His mother, I know, had been a Boston Winesap. But young Weatherwax bore what one politely assumed to be—in republican terms—a noble heritage lightly, and indeed unobtrusively.

He was a student of English Literature, and he sought a Ph.D. When I asked him casually what he was working at, he said that he thought perhaps he might do something with Dickens, if he could get hold of anything new. I considered his attitude rather languid, but this is by no means uncommon among students in the English

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graduate school. Hoping to encourage him, I said that I was certain that if once Dickens thoroughly took hold of him he would become absorbed in his subject.

Ah, fatal prophetic words! Would that I might recall them! But no—I, like poor Tubfast Weatherwax, was a pawn in one of those grim games, not of chance but of destiny, which Fate plays with us in order that we may not grow proud in our pretension to free will.

I saw no more of him for a few weeks, until one day he came to see me, to inquire about Dickens as a dramatist. I am one of the few men in the University who has troubled to read the plays of Charles Dickens, and relate them to the rest of his work, so this was normal enough. He knew nothing about the Nineteenth Century theater, and I told him I thought Dickens' drama unlikely to yield a satisfactory thesis to anyone but an enthusiastic specialist. "And you, Mr. Weatherwax," I said, "did not seem very much caught up in Dickens when last we spoke."

His face changed, lightening unmistakably with enthusiasm. "Oh, that's all in the past," he said. "It's just as you said it would be—I feel that Dickens is really taking hold of me!"

I looked at him more attentively. He had altered since first I saw him. His dress, formerly that elegant disarray that marks the Harvard man—the carefully shabby corduroy trousers, the rumpled but not absolutely dirty shirt, the necktie worn very low and tight around the loins in lieu of a belt—had been changed to extremely tight striped trousers, a tight-waisted jacket with flaring skirts, and around the throat what used to be called, a hundred and fifty years ago, a Belcher neckerchief. And—was I mistaken, or was that shadow upon his cheeks merely the unshavenness which is now so much the fashion, or might it be the first, faint dawning of a pair of sidewhiskers? But I made no comment, and after he had gone I thought no more about the matter.

Not, that is, until the Christmas Dance.

There are many here who remember our Christmas Dance in 1969. It was a delightful affair, and, as always, the dress worn by the College men and their guests ran through the spectrum of modern university elegance. I myself always wear formal evening clothes on these occasions; it is expected of me; of what use is an Establishment figure if he does not look like an Establishment figure? But somewhat to my chagrin I found myself outdone in formality, and by none other than Tubfast Weatherwax III. And yet—was this the ultimate in modern fashion, or was it a kind of fancy dress? His

bottle-green tailcoat, so tight-waisted, so spiky-tailed, so very high in the velvet collar and so sloping in the shoulders; his waistcoat of garnet-velvet, hung all over with watchchains and seals depending from fobs; his wondrously frilled shirt, and the very high starched neckcloth that came up almost to his mouth; his skin-tight trousers; and—could it be? yes, it certainly was—his varnished evening shoes, were in the perfection of the mode of 1836, a date which—it just flashed through my mind—marked the first appearance of *Pickwick Papers*. And his hair—so richly curled, so heaped upon his head! And his sidewhiskers, now exquisite parentheses enclosing the subordinate clause which was his innocent face. It was—yes, it was certainly clear that Tubfast Weatherwax III had got himself up to look like the famous portrait of the young Dickens by Daniel Maclise.

But his companion! No Neo-Victorian she. I thought at first that she was completely topless, but this was not quite true. Braless she certainly was, and her movement was like the waves of ocean. As for her mini, it was a *minissima*—nay, a *parvula*. She was a girl of altogether striking appearance.

"Allow me to present Miss Angelica Crumhorn," said Weatherwax, making a flourishing bow to my wife and myself. "Assuredly she is the brightest ornament of our local stage. But tonight I have tempted her from the footlights and the plaudits of her ravished admirers to grace our academic festivities with beauty and wit. Come, my angel, shall we take the floor?"

"Aw, crap!" said Miss Crumhorn, "where's the gin at?" I knew her. She was very widely known. Indeed, she was notorious, but not as Angelica Crumhorn, which I assume was her real name, but as Gates Ajar Honeypot, star of the Victory Burlesque. She was the leader of an accomplished female group called the Topless Tossers.

If there is one point that has been made amply clear by the university revolt of the past few years, it is this: students will no longer tolerate an educational institution which professes to stand *in loco parentis*; good advice is absolutely *out*. Therefore I did not call young Weatherwax to me the following morning and tell him that he stood on the brink of an abyss, though I knew that this was the case. It was not that, at the dance, he had eyes for no one but Gates Ajar Honeypot; in that he was simply like all the rest of us, for as she danced, Miss Crumhorn gave a stunning exhibition of the accordionlike opening and closing of her bosom by means of which she had won the professional name of Gates Ajar. No, what was wrong was that when he looked at her he seemed to be seeing someone

else—some charming girl of the Regency period, all floating tendrils of hair, pretty ribbons, modest but witty speech, and flirtatious but essentially chaste demeanor. I saw trouble ahead for Tubfast Weatherwax III, but I held my peace.

I thought, you see, that he was trying to be like Charles Dickens. This happens very often in the graduate school; a young man chooses a notable literary figure to work on, and his subject is so much more vital, so infinitely more charged with life than he himself, that he begins to model himself on the topic of his thesis, and until he has gained his Ph.D.—and sometimes even after—he acts the role of that great literary man. You notice it everywhere. If you were to throw an orange in any English graduate seminar you would hit a foetal Henry James, or an embryo James Joyce. Road-company Northrop Fryes and Hallowe'en versions of Marshal McLuhan are to be found everywhere. This has nothing to do with these eminent men; it is part of the theopathic nature of graduate studies. The aspirant to academic perfection so immerses himself in the works of his god that he inevitably takes on something of his quality, at least in externals. It is not the fault of the god. Not at all.

Very well, I thought. Let Tubfast Weatherwax III take his fair hour; he has heard of Dickens' early infatuation with Maria Beadnell; let him try on Dickens' trousers and see how they fit.

This meant no small sacrifice on my part. Whenever I met him, I said, as I should, "Good-day, Mr. Weatherwax"; and then I had to listen to him shout, "Oh, capital, capital! The very best of days, Master! Whoop! Halloo! God bless us every one!" Or if perhaps I said, "Not a very fine day, Mr. Weatherwax," he would reply: "What is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never molts a feather!" I began to avoid encounters with Weatherwax. The only Dickensian reply to this sort of thing that I could think of was, "Bah! Humbug!" but I shrink from giving pain.

But I saw him. Oh, indeed, I saw him crossing the quad, his step as light as a fairy's, with that notable strumpet Gates Ajar Honeypot upon his arm. "Angelica," he insisted on calling her, poor unhappy purblind youth. I longed to speak, but my Wiser Self—who is, I regret to tell you, a cynical, slangy spirit whom I call the Ghost of Experience Past, would intervene, snarling, "Nix on the *loco parentis*," and I would refrain.

Even when he came, last spring, to ask permission to marry Angelica Crumhorn in the Chapel late in August, I merely gave formal

assent. "I shall fill the little Chapel with flowers," he rhapsodized; "flowers for her whose every thought is pure and fragrant as earth's fairest blossom." I repressed a comment that a bridal bouquet of Venus' flytrap would be pretty and original.

I prepared the required page in the College Register, but August came and went, and as nothing had happened I made a notation—Cancelled—on that page and waited the event.

Poor Weatherwax pined, and I ceased to avoid him and began to pity him. I inquired how his Dickens studies went on? He asked me to his rooms in the College and when I visited him I was astonished to find how Victorian, how like chambers in some early Nineteenth Century Inn of Court he had contrived to make them. He even had a bird in a cage: inevitably it was a linnet. The most prominent objects of ornament were a large white plaster bust of Dickens—very large, positively dominant—and a handsome full set of Dickens' Works in twenty-five volumes. I recognized it at once as the Nonesuch Dickens, a very costly set of books for a student, but I knew that Weatherwax had money. He languished in an armchair in a long velvet dressing-gown, his hair hanging over his face, the picture of romantic misery. I decided that—prudent or not—the time had come for me to speak.

"Rally yourself, Mr. Weatherwax," cried I; "marshal your powers, recruit your energies, sir!" I started to hear myself give utterance to these unaccustomed phrases, but with that bust of Dickens looking at me from a high shelf, I could not speak in any other way. So I told him, in good round Victorian prose, that he was making an ass of himself, that he was well quit of Gates Ajar Honeypot, and that he must positively stop trying to be Charles Dickens. "Eating your god," I cried, raising my hand in admonition, "cannot make you into your god. Stop aping Dickens, and read him like a scholar."

To my dismay, he broke down and wept. "Oh, good old man," he sobbed, "you come too late. For I am not eating my god; I fear that my god is eating me! But bless you, bless your snowy locks! You have sought to succor me, but alas, I know that I am doomed!"

I rose to leave him, and as I did so—I tell you this knowing how incredible it must seem—the bust of Dickens seemed to smile, baring sharp, cruel teeth. I shrieked. It was a mental shriek, which is the only kind of shriek permitted to a professor in the modern university, but I gave a mental shriek, and fled the room.

Of course I returned. I know my duty. I know what I owe to the men of Massey College, to the spirit of university education, to that

sense of decency which is one of the holiest possessions of our changing world. And as autumn wore on—it was this autumn just past, but as I look back upon it, it seems far, far away—the conviction grew upon me that Weatherwax's trouble was greater than I had supposed; it was not that he thought he was Dickens, but that he thought he was one of Dickens' characters, and by that abandonment of personality he had set his foot upon a shadowed and sinister path.

One of Dickens' characters? Yes, but which? One of the doomed ones, clearly. But which? Which? For me this past autumn was a season of painful obligation, for not only had I to care for Weatherwax—oh, yes, it reached a point where I took him his meals, and fed him such scant mouthfuls as he could ingest, with my own hands—but I had to adapt myself to the only kind of language he seemed now to understand.

One day—it was in early November—I took him his usual bowl of gruel and found him lying on his little bed, asleep.

"Mr. Weatherwax," I whispered, "nay, let me call you Tubfast; arouse yourself; you must eat something."

"Is it you, Grandfather?" he asked as he opened his eyes, and across his lips stole a smile so sweet, so innocent, so wholly feminine, that in an instant I had the answer to my question. Tubfast Weatherwax III thought he was Little Nell.

His decline from that moment was swift. I spent all the time with him I could. Sometimes his mind wandered and seemed to dwell upon Gates Ajar Honeypot. "I never nursed a dear Gazelle, to glad me with its soft black eye, but when it came to know me well and love me, it was sure to prefer the advances of a fat wholesale furrier on Spadina Avenue," he would murmur. But more often he talked of graduate studies, and of that great Convocation on High where the Chancellor of the Universe confers Ph.D.'s, *magna cum angelic laude*, on all who kneel before his throne.

When I could no longer conceal from myself that the end was near, I dressed his couch here and there with some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a secluded portion of the parking-lot. He knew why. "When I die, put me near to something that has loved the light, and had sky above it always," he murmured. I knew he meant our College quadrangle, for though the new Graduate Library will shortly throw upon our little garden its eternal pall of shadow, it had been while he knew it a place of sunshine and of the laughter of the careless youths who play croquet there.

Then, one drear November night, just at the stroke of midnight,

the end came. He was dead. Dear, patient, noble Tubfast Weatherwax III was dead. His little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage and the strong heart of its child-owner was mute and motionless for ever.

Where were the traces of his early cares, the pangs of despised love, of scholarly tasks too heavy for his feeble mind? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in him, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in his tranquil beauty and profound repose. So shall we know the angels in their majesty, after death.

I wept for a solitary hour, but there was much to be done. I hastened to the quad, lifted one of the paving stones at the north-east end, where—until the Graduate Library is completed—the sun strikes warmest and stays longest. For such a man as I, burdened with years and sorrow, the digging of a six-foot grave was heavy work, and it took me all of ten minutes. With the little chisel in my handy pocket-knife it was the work of an instant to inscribe the stone—

Hic jacet

STABILIS WEATHERWAX TERTIUS

and then, as my Latin is not inexhaustible, I continued—

He bit off more than he could chew.

It was my intention to place the stone over the grave with the inscription downward, so that no unhallowed eye might read it. Now all that remained was to wrap the poor frail body in the velvet dressing-gown and lay it to rest. Or rather I should be compelled to stand it to rest, for the grave had to be dug straight down.

It was only then I raised my eyes toward the windows of Weatherwax's room, which lay on the other side of the quad. What light was that which flickered with an eerie effulgence from the casement? Had I, stunned by my grief, forgotten to turn off the electricity? But no; this light was not the bleak glare of a desk-lamp. It was a bluish light, and it seemed to ebb and flow. Fire? I sped up the stairs and threw open the door.

Oh, what a sight was there revealed to my starting eyes! My hair lifted upward upon my head, as if it were fanned by a cold breath. The bust of Charles Dickens, before so white, so plaster-like, was now grossly flushed with the colors of life. The Nonesuch Dickens,

which had hitherto worn its original binding of many-colored buckram, was—Oh, horror, horror!—bound freshly in leather, and that leather—would that I had no need to reveal it—was human skin! And that smell—why did it so horribly remind me of a dining-room in which some great feast had just been completed? I knew. I knew at once. For the body—the body was gone!

As I swooned, the scarlet lips of the Dickens bust parted in a terrible smile, and its beard stirred in a hiccup of repletion.

It was a few days later—last Friday, indeed—when a young colleague in the Department of English—a very promising Joyce man—said to me, "It is astounding how Dickens studies are picking up; quite a few theses have been registered in the past three months." I knew he despised Dickens and all the Victorians, so I was not surprised when he added, "Wonderful how the old wizard keeps life in him! Upon what meat doth this our Charlie feed, that he is grown so great?"

He smiled, pleased at his little literary joke. But I did not smile, because I knew.

Yes. I knew.

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Cooley was one of the strangest serial killers in the annals of crime—and one of the nicest . . .

THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

by **JON L. BREEN**

Say, friend, would you mind tossing that wrapper in the wastebasket? I can't stand littering, even the floor of a barroom.

Hey, don't get uptight about it, pal. No, I'm not any boy scout, but I have a good reason for my litterphobia. Humor me, will you? Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it. Next drink's on me.

Back in my newspaper days, one of the stories I covered was the case of James Henry Cooley. Ever notice how killers are always referred to by three names? Well, Cooley was one of the strangest serial killers in the annals of crime—and, I might add, one of the nicest. That may sound strange, but everybody liked Jimmy Cooley—even the cops who arrested him. He was a very pleasant fellow.

He lived in a little town up in the mountains, where he worked as a sort of general handyman. Cooley loved the outdoors. He was a hiker and a climber and a camper—not a hunter, though, which is ironic considering his later career. Jimmy knew everybody in town, always had a friendly good morning for them. Only one thing ever seemed to make Jimmy Cooley mad, and that was litter. If somebody left a beer can or a candy wrapper or a cigarette butt on the ground, especially out in the wilderness, Jimmy would blow sky high. People in town laughed about it. Of course, they agreed with him—those with any consideration for other people—but they thought Jimmy was prone to overreaction. As it turned out, they didn't know the half of it.

One summer in that mountain community, people were quivering in their hiking boots. Some crazy nut with a shotgun was offing

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people in the forest, sometimes two or three at a time. The killer left no clues except for an anti-litter flyer pinned to the body. You'd have to say the series of killings *did* improve the litter problem some that summer—except for the bodies, of course.

It seems funny, looking back, that even with the killer advertising his motivation, nobody thought of Jimmy Cooley. He was such a nice guy, he had to be caught red-handed by a potential victim who played dead before anybody connected the killings to him.

Once he was caught, he confessed right away, considerate fellow that he was. He said he just couldn't abide litter, so he took to climbing a tree out in the forest and watching the hikers and campers down below. Not as a voyeur—he wanted that clearly understood. All he was interested in was whether they packed out what they packed in and didn't litter up the forest. When they did leave some litter, well, something just came over him and he felt compelled to blow their brains out with his shotgun.

Jimmy Cooley got nine people before he was caught.

I covered his trial, and as you can imagine it was one of a kind. His defense lawyer, a heavy hitter from San Francisco, entered the obvious plea: not guilty by reason of insanity. Everybody knew Jimmy just had to be nuts. And, as I say, everybody liked him. Oh, maybe not the families of the people he killed, but everybody else—his own lawyer, the prosecutor, the jurors, the judge, and we of the fourth estate, too.

So almost everybody seemed happy when, after the weeks-long duel of defense shrinks and prosecution shrinks, Jimmy was found not guilty by reason of insanity and put away in a maximum-security mental institution. It never occurred to anybody he might ever get out.

Well, Jimmy's most recent sanity hearing took place just a little over a year ago. I didn't cover it personally, having long since retired to serious drinking in establishments like this one. But I'm told it was wilder than his trial. Being the nice fellow he was, he'd made a lot of friends up at the institution and the chief shrink there was convinced he was rehabilitated—a sane man once again.

As you might expect, the families of the victims made a lot of noise. "Let this maniac out," they said, "and he'll go off and start killing people again."

"No, he won't," they were reassured by the chief shrink. "Jimmy Cooley has always been a basically well intentioned person, a good

citizen. He just happened to overreact to one particular social ill in an unacceptable way. He fully understands how inappropriate his behavior was and he's willing to do what is necessary to avoid a recurrence."

And what was that? Well, Jimmy Cooley's days as an outdoorsman were over. It was the despoiling of nature that really set him off. To assure he'd stay on the straight and narrow, from now on he would live in the city. This city, as a matter of fact. There's litter in the city, too, of course—we all know that—but it wouldn't have the same effect on Jimmy as litter in his beloved mountain woods.

Miraculously enough, Jimmy was released from the mental hospital on the condition that he be closely watched and never leave the metropolitan area.

How's he getting along? Oh, just fine, it seems. A job had been arranged for him, and from the start he got along fine with his coworkers. Everybody liked him.

Should they have let him out? Well, I'm not a hundred percent sure about that. I wouldn't accuse anybody without evidence, but—hey, I may be talking too much. Look, this has to stay between us. I still have my contacts on the police and the local papers and what I'm going to tell you is not for general dissemination.

I hear there's another serial killer at work in this city. In the last month, four people have been blown away. They all had one thing in common: they'd parked their cars in those parking places reserved for the handicapped.

Hey, where you goin'? You didn't finish your drink.

* * *

Last issue we included recipes from that issue's contributors as a kind of holiday treat. This story by Jon L. Breen had to be "bounced" from that issue for lack of space and so we are only now giving you his intriguing recipe. You will find it on page 158.

a **NEW** short story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

"Dry as a bone. Hard as a stone. Idiot. Jackass." Piggott snarling at his wife.

"Oh, my," said the nurse, dismayed. "Oh-oh-my." Not a bruised gum at all. Not at all. Mr. Piggott, she said, had Vincent's angina . . .

MR. AND MRS. PIGGOTT

by **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

Lived in a vine-covered cottage at the bottom of a street lined with two-storey red-brick semidetached houses. All of which had once been The Piggott Estate. In the Old Days. Before The Crash. Had been obliged to take a mortgage on The Property. And then a second mortgage. Unable to meet Their Obligations. Terrible. Terrible. To see the Old Home razed to the ground, green fields vanish under bricks and mortar. Lucky to save the cottage.

"Tell her, 'We don't know how lucky we are,'" Mr. Piggott said, waving his hand toward his wife. "Just to have a roof over our heads." He raised his eyebrows and blew out his moustache and nodded his head. A large man. Mr. Piggott's nose was veined like some kinds of marble or cheese. Little tufts of grey hair grew on the bridge of it, on the backs of his fingers, in his ears.

"Well, it certainly is a wonderful thing," their visitor said vaguely. This was Miss Winslow, Registered Nurse, round and pink.

If Mrs. Piggott did not, indeed, know just how lucky she was, it was not from having been insufficiently reminded by Mr. P.

A little white sparrow of a woman. Whatever she had ever possessed of strength and beauty seemed to have vanished—or have been absorbed by her hair, coil after black coil of it, piled up high

© 1986 by Avram Davidson.

on her little head. "Yes, Jacob," Mrs. Piggott would say. Or, sometimes, depending on the previous remark, "No, Jacob."

Her lord now pounced upon the visitor's last enunciation. "Wonderful?" he cried, bulging his eyes still farther out, and waving his arms. "Wonderful? See the hall of one's ancestors crushed to rubble? Wonderful?"

Miss Winslow, whom a thousand and one or two such occasions had not taught better, grew agitated. Licked her full lips and shook her head. Leaned forward for emphasis.

"No!" she cried. "Oh, noo! I didn't mean—*not* having your house torn— What I meant was, it was so wonderful that you were able to save this lovely little cottage, and—all that. *That's* what I meant, Mr. Piggott." With a final lick of her lips, she settled back in the chair. Like most in the house it rocked uncertainly, had leaking upholstery and springs which threatened to lunge and assault unwary flesh. But not, of course, Mr. Piggott's chair.

"Say no more about it," he said now, generously. Almost genially, warm from forgiveness. "Misunderstood me. Almost as bad as my idiot wife, ha ha ha."

And Miss Winslow, with a tiny glance darted at her hostess, laughed, too, throwing back her head. All just a little joke of Mr. Piggott's. Jolly Mr. Piggott.

"Well, well. Enough of my own sorrows and trials. Cheated by the world of commerce which I, as a rich man's son, was never familiarized with until as an adult I learned the hard way. Reality. Knowing reality from illusion. My only salvation. Unlike my gooney-bird wife, ha ha ha!" (*Ha ha ha*, from Miss Winslow: else how to admit that one thought a woman might be insulted before one's eyes? No: *Ha ha ha!* Another of Mr. Piggott's little jokes.)

"You, the same," said he now—Mrs. Piggott having silently disappeared into the kitchen—smiling. Miss Winslow cleared her throat inquiringly. Illusion. What she lived by. Pandering to the fools who thought they were sick. First illusion. That medicines could cure them. Second illusion. That Miss Winslow knew anything *about* medicines. Third illusion.

His guest drew back her head, moistened the corners of her mouth in preparation for speech. Had no chance. There were in the whole country how many men who really knew anything about the subject? Would Miss Winslow care to guess? Ten thousand? *One* thousand? *One hundred?* Made a man laugh. How many? Oh, no. Never anything like it. Nothing like it. *Three*, that was how many. One was

Professor Schuyler, who had written a book about the medical racket. And what was his reward? Kicked out of his job in one of the biggest universities in the country. The second was a medical doctor with whom Mr. Piggott had once played golf. Before the Crash. Admitted as much. Question put to him point-blank.

"Know as much about it as if you were a trained medical doctor yourself, Mr. Piggott," this man had said. "Impossible to fool you. Truth. Starve to death if I said it publicly," this man, biggest man in the medical profession, had admitted.

"Welll," Miss Winslow began.

Enter, silently, Mrs. Piggott, coils of hair wobbling, bent beneath a heavy tea tray. Thereon: a huge teapot, three huge teacups, three saucers, a tea-caddy, and several rather dry and dusty-looking cookies of the sort which had been peddled through the neighborhood almost a year ago by the local Girl Scouts.

"What have we *here*, gooney-bird?" jovial Piggott demanded. He hazarded a conjecture. "Tea?"

"Yes, Jacob."

Rubbed his hands. "Must feed the inner man in his corporal nature well as his spiritual." Lifted the lid of the ancestral teapot, opened the caddy, spooned in two spoons, far from full. "Leave it to Dumb Dora, black as ink," he said. "Tannic acid: deadly poison. As well drink arsenic. Eh, Dumb Dora?"

Mrs. Piggott's Christian name was Alice. "Yes, Jacob," she said. After a while poured the pale-colored fluid into the cups, adjured by the master of the house not to stint, to pour full measure regardless of possible loss to the rakeoff she skimmed from her housekeeping money.

"No, Jacob."

"What 'No'? Ghosts, I suppose, put money in that empty jar on the top shelf in there. Spooks. Gooney-bird. Idiot. Ha ha."

Faintly, something about "for emergencies." Fainter yet, a something about "giving her little enough for housekeeping." A redness about Piggott's face then, except for the nose, which showed a whiteness about the nostrils. Veins of red and blue and purple standing out. Teeth bared, crooked and yellow, under the dirty moustache. Not a nice sight then, Piggott.

"Delicious cookies." Miss Winslow speaking loudly, thrusting the plate with them toward her host. Glare—at her, at his wife, at the plate—then, chuckling, picked up a cookie, thrust it into his mouth, biting down hard and fierce as if it were his wife's birdlike little

bones crunching between his jaws. "Delicious," Miss Winslow's voice sank.

Piggott cried out. Eyes screwed up. Hasty mouthful of weak, warm tea, jagged swallow. "Oh," he moaned. "Mmmmm. Oh."

Suddenly in her familiar element, "Why, what is *wrong*, Mr. Piggott?" Miss Winslow, Registered Nurse, inquired. "Did you break a tooth? I hope—"

"Dry as a bone. Hard as a stone. Idiot. Jackass." Piggott snarling at wife.

"—not."

Bruised a gum, said Piggott, calm, though breathing heavily. Miss Winslow begged him to let her look. Proud, disdainful: no. Just *look*? she pleaded. What would it hurt to— Mr. Piggott bent forward as suddenly as if he were intent on snapping the buttons off the bosom of her tailored jacket with his lemon teeth and pulled his lower lip down between tufted thumb and tufted forefinger.

"Oh, my," said the nurse, dismayed. "Oh-oh-my." *Not* a bruised gum at all. Not at *all*. Mr. Piggott, she said, had Vincent's angina.

Leaned back in his chair, smiling. Sneering? "Illusion," he said. "An illusion of pain: my part. Illusion of disease: your part. Your profession frighten people. Take their money. Fleeced like sheep. Lambs. Eh, jackass? Ha ha."

Meekly, "Yes, Jacob." Faintly, to Miss Winslow, "Catching?"

Oh, highly contagious, she was assured. Became agitated. A glee upon the part of her grisly lord, and laughter. Gooney-bird was afraid of getting sick, he crowed. Idiot was scared her lovely teeth would fall out. Brushed them three times a day, her white teeth. Use dental floss, if someone in the house didn't have sense enough to put his foot down.

"No, really, it is *highly contagious*. You must keep all your dishes separate, Mr. Piggott—" Looked down with some dismay on her teacup.

Now quite happy, elated indeed, rubbing his Roquefort nose with two tufted fingers, Piggott absently thrust the other bit of the cookie into his mouth, again cried out with pain—illusory or not as that may be. Miss Winslow followed up Mrs. Piggott's weak-voiced plea of, "Take something, Jacob," with an offer to procure him a preparation for the cure of Vincent's angina. But to no avail. Take foreign substances into your body, man would have to be even more of a fool than some people took him for. And subsided thereafter into sullen

silence, lower lip and cheek and moustache moving as questing tongue explored the tender areas.

Miss Winslow left after a little while.

"Why do you go back if he's so terrible?" Winslow's old friend from nursing school, Stromeyer from OB (Winslow being in Out-Patients), asked her. Oh, well, Winslow explained with a shrug, who else would the poor little thing ever get to see if she (Winslow) stayed away? Besides—such a lovely little cottage. Besides (unspoken), who else would the Out-Patients nurse get to talk to on her day off? Stromeyer having, firstly, a different day off and, secondly, a family. The other nurses, well, all the young ones ever thought about was *men*, and what did she want with the others? Bunch of old maids, poor things!

"How is your mouth today, Mr. Piggott?" she asked. Not caring to risk a repetition of the arid and adamantine cookies, she had made bold to bring along some nice cream-cake: it looked so tempting, she explained, handing over the bakery-box, that she just hadn't the will-power to resist. Would they forgive her?

Didn't fool Mr. Piggott for a minute. "Oh, our humble fare is no longer good enough for you?" he charged. "Impossible with us to compete with the dainties served up to the hospital staff. Note: I say 'staff.' Patients something else altogether." He took a piece of cream-cake and thrust it into his mouth and chewed it. And chewed it. And chewed it. And—

—caught Miss Winslow's eye. She looked away at once, too late. "Food-bolting: digging your grave with your teeth. Secret of good health? Fletcherizing. Chew each mouthful a hundred times. Don't believe it? Bad as my imbecile wife, ha ha ha. Only way to eat. Masticate every mouthful, soon be the picture of good health."

Mr. Piggott did not look the picture of good health, looked yellowed and sick. Fell silent a moment as Miss Winslow continued to pick at her piece of cake with her fingers, sneak a glance at Mrs. Piggott. Mrs. Piggott looked none too well, either. Under her eyes were blue smudges which might have been caused by lack of sleep, on her cheek a blue smudge which couldn't possibly have been.

Piggott's voice, next heard, sounded unlike his usual self-assured, ride-over-all one. "Been having such illusions of pain and illness," he muttered. "Nausea—"

"Oh, that's too *bad*," Miss Winslow said, professional and concerned. "Your mouth—"

The old Piggott returned with a roar. "Nothing to do with my mouth! Said it was an illusion!"

Miss Winslow was very sorry, but it was no illusion. She guessed she knew Vincent's angina when she saw it. She was very sorry to have to disagree with her host in his very own house, but trench mouth was something she had been familiar with since her earliest days in training, and there was no doubt about it.

"Your *mouth*," she said, "must be in *agony* by now."

Piggott, moaning, plagued by idiot women (he said). Piggott once again drawing down his lower lip, then lifting his upper one, thrusting out his tongue, exposing the lining of his cheeks. Piggott, seeing her astonished face, triumphant. Well? Look like it's in agony? Eh?

Miss Winslow shook her head. "Why, it's almost *gone*," she said, wonder-struck. "What have you been taking for it?"

Taking? Piggott? Foreign substances into his body? Nothing at all was what he'd been taking. Fletcherizing was the answer. Chewed his food until it was in proper shape to be digested and washed his liquids around in his mouth until all the enzymes were absorbed.

"I never saw anything like it," she marveled.

Piggott's look of triumph vanished. Bent over, moaning. Came up green. "You—are—*sick*," said Miss Winslow. "I am going to call a doctor."

"Slam the door in his face. Quacks. Nurses, too. Think I'm blind, you and them and my wife. Ahh—" Came convulsively to his feet, left the room at a trot. Could be heard in the bathroom, retching.

Silence. Miss Winslow, shocked by his illness, vexed by his words, dismayed by the look of utter malignancy cast after him by his wife (what *was* that bruise on her face? poor little thing), began to babble.

"Well, I never in my entire professional career saw such a remarkable recovery from a case of Vincent's. Vincent's is a *very* troublesome thing to get rid of. Peroxide, of course, well, peroxide *does* help, but the *best* thing, the *best* thing, Mrs. Piggott, is arspphenamin. Arspphenamin, I don't suppose you've heard of it, it's made from arsenic, they paint the mouth with it—" Her voice trailed away.

Oh, how suddenly little Mrs. Piggott's eyes left the hallway onto which the bathroom opened! Oh, what a look there was in her eyes! As if she hated Miss Winslow, too, not just Mr. Piggott! Mr. Piggott— Suddenly, suddenly, and all the little bits of pieces fell into place: Mr. Piggott's yellowed face, his nausea, his Fletcherizing, constant chewing of every bit of food, round and round in his mouth, each mouthful of solid or liquid round and round, against cheeks and

tongue and insides of lips, and the odd blue bruise on Mrs. Piggott's cheek.

"Mrs. Piggott," she breathed. "Oh. Oh, Mrs. Piggott!"

Mr. Piggott was still to be heard vomiting and groaning as his guest found her feet and fled from the lovely little vine-covered cottage and into the street.

She had to tell someone, of course, and so she told Stromeyer. Stromeyer told Dr. Callanan and he spoke to Dr. Brosy, the police surgeon. Mrs. Piggott, all things considered, drew a very light sentence. She could, in fact, have gotten out on parole in a couple of years or so, but she refused to apply. For one thing, she explained (her lovely long hair short and grey), she'd have to say she was sorry, and she *wasn't*. And for another thing, while prison had its drawbacks, having to live with Mr. Piggott wasn't one of them. It was just as well that she hadn't succeeded in killing him, since it was all found out, but since it was up to her she thought she'd just stay right where she was.

Yes, Jacob.



DETECTIVERSE

SHE'LL GETCHA

by VI WESTERLUND

A gal name of Jessica Fletcher
Matched wits with a murderous lecher.
The rest of it's history,
She unravelled the mystery,
And they carried him out on a stretcher.

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a **NEW short story by**

WILLIAM BANKIER

"Can you take over, Miss Good?" Fetterson said. "Wally, slide over to the couch. Put your feet up."

As Wingbeat left the boardroom table, Penelope Good unbuttoned her jacket to reveal a nicely rounded white-silk blouse. Placing a fist on her hip authoritatively, she said in a voice worthy of the Royal Shakespeare Company, "The summary requires less than a glance at this time. May I direct your attention to the following pages, where, market by market, we see the media breakdown. Forgive the word 'breakdown,' Walter," she said . . .

FEAR IS A KILLER

by WILLIAM BANKIER

With his heart pounding, Walter Wingbeat sat at the boardroom table half listening to what Clay Fetterson was telling the client. "Nor do we usually formulate an advertising plan before the product is developed and tested. But in this case, at your request—"

As the head of R&B Advertising continued his preamble, Wingbeat glanced from face to face around the mahogany oval. The client, Norman Imrie, president of Metro Distillers, was looking noble. Sensing Wingbeat's attention, Imrie returned an encouraging smile. Tough, but fair and decent—that was Mr. Imrie.

"So we have prepared, among other exhibits," Fetterson continued, "a media plan. But before I ask our media manager to take us through it, may I voice anxiety over the name of the new product. A liqueur distilled in America is a great idea. Using the flowers of an indigenous desert plant gives us something to talk about in the advertising. But for a drink, the name Yucca—"

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Wingbeat was turning his pages. He remembered what it was to breathe deeply but the technique had escaped him for the moment. The imaginary iron strapping around his chest was at maximum clamp. Pinprick bubbles of light fizzed around the periphery of his vision.

A hand touched his. A voice murmured, "Are you all right?" It was Penelope Good, the girl from England. He had hired her as his assistant three months ago. The department was in need of people but Wingbeat was afraid to hire. What if he chose the wrong person? In Miss Good, it looked as if he had brought in somebody very good indeed. And now he was afraid of *that*.

He managed a smile, glazed eyes and sick lips that would have stampeded nurses in an intensive-care unit. "Butterflies," he whispered, fluttering a flat hand. "Okay once I start."

She made a kissing face at him. It was way out of line, he hadn't even taken her to lunch yet. Her honey hair was much too smart for the money she earned. How did she manage? Her suit looked expensive. Her blue eyes were calm. Penelope Good fitted in around the executive table like the maroon-leather armchairs themselves.

"Not to worry," she mouthed silently. "I'm with you."

Apprehension about the new brand-name had been expressed to Norman Imrie before. "Be assured, gentlemen and lady," he said, "the name Yucca has been thoroughly tested. I went around my office and spoke to twenty people. Told them my wife had come up with a concept and a name for a new liqueur. Yucca. What did they think? Not one negative reaction. One hundred percent in favor."

Clay Fettererson's grin became brighter than a thousand suns. Wingbeat had to avert his eyes as the boss said, "Can't argue with research as conclusive as that. On we go. Let's take a look at the media plan. Everybody got a copy? Fine. Wally, will you lead us through this?"

"Uh, sure, Clay." Wingbeat was alone, terrified. "These are rough figures, guestimates, because I was told I wouldn't see a budget until after the taste-testing, which I understand is not happening until—"

"Could you just take us through it, Wally?"

"Sure, Clay. Uh, page one is a summary of the major markets, with some additional weighting in—" The iron bands tightened. Wingbeat's breath was reduced to a flutter. "Oh, wow," he said, as panic took over.

"Everything okay, Wally?"

Elbows on the table, Wingbeat put a flat hand on either side of

his face, shutting out witnesses to his humiliation. To die like this, in public— "Trouble breathing. Just a minute."

"Is there pain?" The observers were riveted. They were not callous people but if the media manager went in mid-presentation—would *that* be a story to dominate drinks this evening.

"Not a lot of pain," Wingbeat said. He was coming out of it. It was stress, tension. "Have to get my breath."

"Should the man try to continue?" Norman Imrie asked. He was less entertained than the others. "Give him a rest."

"Exactly right," Fetterson said. "Can you take over, Miss Good? Wally, slide over to the couch. Put your feet up."

As Wingbeat left the table, Penelope Good unbuttoned her jacket to reveal a nicely rounded white-silk blouse. Placing a fist on her hip authoritatively, she said in a voice worthy of the Royal Shakespeare Company, "The summary requires less than a glance at this time. May I direct your attention to the following pages, where, market by market, we see the media breakdown. Forgive the word 'breakdown,' Walter," she said and everybody laughed, including Wingbeat.

As was his habit, Wingbeat worked a couple of extra hours after closing to give the Friday-evening traffic a chance to clear. By the time he drove home and parked his car in the driveway that separated his cedar-and-stone bungalow from the brick-and-stucco cottage next door, his wife and son had finished their supper. Corliss was in a deckchair on the back lawn under one of the stately poplars, holding a depleted glass of gin and tonic in her hand. A glow and babble from the television room showed where young Philip was hiding.

"Cold plate in the fridge," Corliss said as she accepted her evening kiss. There was a book opened face-down on her lap, something heavy from the non-fiction bestsellers list. Corliss Wingbeat was never seen without a book, but she seldom read anything clear through. Her last conquest dated back several years—*Jonathon Livingston Seagull*.

Wingbeat ate his salad standing up in the kitchen. Taking food out-of-doors in view of the neighbors gave him a queasy feeling. After rinsing and stacking his plate, he wandered through to change his clothes. On the way past the TV room, he looked in on Philip, who smiled tenderly at him as he reduced the sound.

"Evening, Pip," Walter said to his eleven-year-old. "Shouldn't you be outside enjoying the glorious fresh air?"

"Same air in here, Father." The boy indicated the open window.

"You have a point." Wingbeat lingered.

"Is everything all right?" Pip was watching his father's face.

"Just fine! It's the weekend!" The distressed adman clapped his hands and executed a buck-and-wing. The step was not badly done. A generation ago, he had sparkled as one of the policemen in a high-school production of *The Pirates of Penzance*.

"You look sad, Father."

"The mature face in repose, my son. Nothing to be alarmed about. How's this?" Wingbeat hooked an index finger in either side of his mouth and dragged his lips upwards into a manic smile. At the same time he let his eyes go crossed. Philip fell over, laughing and rolling on the carpet and Wingbeat walked away feeling good for the first time in days.

When he appeared on the back lawn ten minutes later, dressed in slacks and T-shirt and his recently whited tennis shoes, the sun was setting. Its last rays picked out the awkwardly sporty figure and made him glow. The raucous voice of Wingbeat's neighbor, Larry Boxer, filled the silence.

"Hey, Wally," he bellowed, "dim your shoes!"

As Wingbeat dragged a chair across the grass and sat close to his wife, she muttered, "Why don't you tell that oaf to shut his big mouth?"

"He's only kidding."

"You let people push you around, Walter. It isn't good for you. What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid."

"You *are*." Corliss raised her voice just enough. "You reek fear."

"I've never seen the sense in contention. Why argue with people? Cooperation is more productive." He had not played his trump card in months. Tonight it seemed risky but he threw it down anyway. "It works for me. I'm the head of media in one of Canada's leading ad agencies." Secretly, Wingbeat knew why they kept him in the job. Because he worked all the hours God sends, not employing extra staff, keeping the department budget low. He would never say this to his wife. He was afraid to.

Corliss finished her third drink. She was feeling comfortably aggressive. "How is the smarmy limey?" she asked.

He knew she was referring to Penelope Good. There had been bad

blood between the two women since an office party a couple of months ago at which the English newcomer mistook Corliss Wingbeat for catering staff, handing her an empty glass. "Who?"

"You know who. Penelope Put-down. I'd keep an eye on her. She wants your job. And God help her if she takes it." Corliss modified her threat. "God help *you*."

"We can help each other," Penelope said, glancing at Clay Fetterson for confirmation. The hotel dining room was medium busy for two o'clock. It was unusual for Walter Wingbeat to be lunching in such surroundings at such an hour. His normal lunch was tuna salad on whole wheat taken at his desk along with yet another mug of company coffee.

"My idea exactly," the managing director said. "You obviously need relief, Wally. We don't want a repetition of the seizure episode last week. Bad impression in front of the client. I know it's illogical but it could make him think R&B Advertising is not healthy."

"It hasn't happened before," Wingbeat said. "Shouldn't happen again." Fear flooded his belly.

"We're seeing to that," the boss said. "Penny will take on the executive responsibilities. She will confront ferocious clients in their dens. Meanwhile, the wealth of Wingbeat experience will still be ours to tap when and as we need it."

Penelope could only repeat what she had said before. "We can help each other." But her grin was tight and she swallowed without drinking or eating anything.

"And now," Fetterson said, "we'd better get back to the office. At four-thirty, we taste-test Metro Distillers' newest product, Yucca Liqueur."

"Yeeeeuch!" Penelope said, pretending to recoil as the managing director landed a playful punch on her arm.

Testing a client's product was almost like being let out of school. Opinions were so widely sought that every member of the agency staff, from Clay Fetterson himself on down to the lowliest filing clerk, was welcomed into the boardroom to join the party and put forward an opinion. This product being made with alcohol, the session was scheduled for late in the working day. By five o'clock closing time, the room looked and sounded something like happy hour at a neighborhood bar.

Several bottles of Yucca stood open on the mahogany table, pro-

tected now with a linen cover. Almost everyone punctuated the first sip of the liqueur with the spontaneous reaction— "Yeeeeuch!"

"That name has got to go," a copywriter on the account would say and the crowd would laugh.

But the sober truth was, the stuff did taste vile. Nobody wanted a second glass of it—except for Penelope Good. The English import swilled the liqueur down and became merrier by the minute. "Jolly nice," she commented. "Not finishing your sample, love? Waste not, want not, I'll just tip your glass into mine."

Wingbeat was among those who abominated the mickey-mouse booze. But, a solid agency man, he appreciated the fact that Yucca was the brainchild of the client's wife and he knew they would have to sell it.

Wife. Watching Penelope getting high, he brooded. Here was his replacement as head of the department. Soon it would be made public and Corliss would have to know. Staff might accept the change and forget about it but his wife would not take it easily.

"Cheer up, Wally," Fettererson said, his overfed face florid with good-fellowship. "It may never happen."

"It already has."

"You hate presenting to clients. You'll be happier out of the rat-race."

"There are others involved."

Fettererson, a married man, knew what his former media chief was getting at. "Explain to Corliss. Tell her the job was killing you."

Wingbeat left the session. He fled to the safety of his desk, lost himself in pages of figures which demanded nothing of him except that he arrange them in columns that added up. Never mind the job killing him. Robbed of her prestige as wife of a manager, deprived of the extra money that went with the responsibility, Corliss would make his life not worth living.

The idea entered Wingbeat's troubled mind without preamble. Kill or be killed. It was preposterous, but perhaps it was the only way. Not Corliss—he would never murder his wife. But if he could find some safe way to terminate Penelope Good's stay on the planet, his problem would disappear.

Wingbeat was so shaken by the possibility that he left the office earlier than usual and drove home in rush-hour traffic. His street looked different at a quarter to six, with men getting out of cars and wives greeting them. Larry Boxer was opening his front door, jacket

off, shirt sleeves rolled, bulging briefcase hinting at problems the jovial salesman faced like anybody else.

"What happened, Wally?" he called. "Fired at last?"

"Not yet, Larry." Wingbeat was so harassed, he let fly an answering salvo. "But when they drop me, I'm coming over to live off you."

Inside the house, he took his wife and son by surprise. They were playing dominos at the kitchen table. Corliss had her first gin and tonic beside her. Philip was getting through milk and cookies.

"Good Lord," Corliss said, as if a game-show host had climbed out of the television set. "What are you doing here?"

"I live here. Hello, dear." He kissed her and ruffled the cornsilk hair on his son's giant head. "Evening, Pip." As he moved off to change his clothes, he said, "Think I'll do a little gardening. Not hungry yet."

"Have you been drinking?"

"Taste-testing. Metro's new liqueur."

"Is it as bad as it smells?"

Ten minutes later, wearing an R&B sweatshirt and the trousers he was proud of because of their grass-stained knees, Wingbeat hurried down to the gardening shed and brought out clippers, rake, work-gloves, and a plastic bag for rubbish. The tin of weed-killer was almost full. He took it to the light and began reading the copy on the label. It certainly carried enough warnings about the danger of swallowing the stuff.

"Father?" Philip was watching him.

"Hello again, Pip." He felt uncomfortable, caught in the act. "Nothing on the box just now? Aren't they rerunning *Dr. Who*?"

"Can I help you? I want to help."

"Take the clippers and go up to the rock garden. Trim the grass between the rocks."

"What are you going to be doing?"

"Finishing reading this." Empathy between father and son was intense. Wingbeat had to turn away as his eyes filled up. "Get on with it, son," he said. "Dad needs to be alone."

Early next morning, briefcase in hand, Wingbeat left the breakfast table and walked not to his car but across the back lawn to the gardening shed. Inside, he opened the briefcase, took up the tin of weed-killer, fitted it carefully inside between files, then closed the case.

"What gives?" Corliss called from the doorway as he came back and let himself into the car. Pip's calm face watched from the kitchen window.

"Left my watch on the shelf last night," he said, raising his wrist as an exhibit. It was no lie. Anticipating such a question, he had taken off his watch and left it in the shed before going after dandelions last night with a rusty knife.

Penelope Good paid him a short visit at half past nine, perching on his spare chair, crossing her shiny legs and swallowing coffee from a mug with "Carnaby Street" silk-screened on it. Then, "Must run, love," she said. Penny called everybody love, or ducks. "The idiot in the corner office wants to pick my brains about a new-business presentation."

Her irreverence about Fetterson only made Wingbeat wonder how she talked about *him* in front of others. "All right, love," he said. "Did you enjoy the Yucca tasting?"

"Fabulous. I can't understand why the others were putting it down."

Wingbeat had smuggled a full bottle out of the boardroom. He opened his bottom drawer and lifted the jug into view. "Play your cards right—" he hinted.

"Yummy-yum," the girl said, rounding her eyes.

"You never know your luck in a big city," he told her. "This could be the day!"

When she was gone, he closed his door. He found a sheet of clean paper and folded it crisply. He twisted open the cap on the bottle and removed it. He took the tin of weed-killer from his briefcase and poured a quantity of the white powder into the V of the folded paper. Then he funneled the poison carefully into the bottle, tapping the paper to expedite the flow. Last of all, he capped the bottle, turning it a few times to disperse the powder. The bottle stored away, he opened the door, went back to his chair, and lost himself in a forest of numbers.

At four-thirty, Wingbeat wrapped the bottle in a brown-paper bag left over from one of his frugal lunches. Then he got into his jacket, took hold of his briefcase in one hand and the bag in the other, and walked down the hall to Penelope's office. She was on the telephone, shoes tumbled on the carpet, stocking-feet propped on her desk. As she spoke and listened, she read her visitor in the doorway, his face, his briefcase, the rounded paper bag. The silky toes crimped and flexed.

"Is this an imposition?" Wingbeat asked when, at last, she terminated her call. "I know it isn't closing time yet, but this bottle needs drinking. And you *do* enjoy the stuff. And I used to be manager of this department and you soon will be, so between the two of us we ought to be free to—"

"Say no more, say no more." The girl got up and slipped her feet into the alligator high-heels. She put on a Charles Boyer voice. "Come wis me to ze Casbah. I have cheese to go wis de booze!"

The receptionist performed not a double- but a triple-take as she saw the unlikely couple vanish into an elevator. "Strategy conference," Penelope called as the door slid shut.

Home from school, Philip Wingbeat raised suspicion in his mother's mind by not raiding the refrigerator directly. "Are you all right?" she asked him.

"Worried."

"What about? Damn it, you've been sleeping in class again. I'm going to have to pay yet another boring visit to placate the principal."

"Worried about Father. He seems depressed."

"He enjoys it. If it wasn't for me pushing him, he'd be shining shoes at Central Station."

Philip could not bring himself to mention the weed-killer. His silence on the subject had something to do with preserving his father's dignity. But he was determined to sound a warning. After that, he would have done everything in his power.

"Mother, it isn't like other times. I think he may try something. Father needs help."

Corliss Wingbeat heard something in her son's voice. An alarm rang inside her head. Walter had come home on time from work the other night. That was definitely odd. The boy's rapport with his father was close. "You may be right," she said. Leaving her chair, she went and found her purse, throwing in wallet and car keys. It was one thing to tease Walter in a casual way, but she wanted him secure for quite a few years yet. "I'll collect your father at the office. We'll have supper out. I'll talk to him. Feed yourself from the fridge, darling."

Corliss drove in the opposite direction to the main flow of traffic, arriving at the R&B offices just as the receptionist was putting things away. "I'm sorry, you've missed him, Mrs. Wingbeat," the girl said. She could hardly believe her luck. Wingbeat's wife never came to get him. And tonight, of all nights!

"I can't have missed him. It's barely five o'clock."

"He left early." The smile came easily. "Along with Penny Good. They said they were going for a strategy conference."

By a heroic effort, Corliss managed to conceal most of her fury from this twerpy girl. "Have you any idea where they're holding their conference?"

"Penny's apartment isn't far from here." The receptionist checked a list in a rare display of efficiency. She recited the address, adding, "It's the old converted building around the corner."

Walter Wingbeat was surprised at the smart interior of the apartment, situated as it was in such a grotty old structure. He said so as he cracked the cap on the bottle of Yucca, pretending he was breaking a seal.

"Thanks," Penelope said. "I badgered the landlord into plastering the cracks and painting. The rest I did myself. But the exterior is not to be believed. I shudder at the thought of a fire." She produced two tumblers. "Sorry I don't have liqueur glasses."

"You'll buy a nice set of crystal," Walter confided, pouring a generous measure of the ruby liquid into one of the tumblers, "out of your first pay as department head. Listen, have you got any juice or mineral water? I'm not as keen on this stuff as you are."

"Hurray, more for me!" She brought him a bottle of fizzy orange. "You're awfully good about this job change," she said. "Some men would be homicidal."

"Truth is, the stress was killing me. You've done me a favor, you and Fetterson." He poured his orange, toasted her, drank as heavily as she did. The important thing, the reason for his being here, would be to get rid of the remains of the poisoned liqueur after she keeled over. Then, to fake illness himself. When she was well and truly deceased, he would "come around" and telephone for an ambulance. Too late.

"Yeeeeuch!" the English girl said with delight. She poured the drink down her throat and reached for the bottle. "I don't care if the public laughs at the name and hates the product. I shall drink all they can produce."

Nearly an hour had passed and half the bottle of cactus liqueur was in Penelope Good's stomach when the door buzzer sounded. Wingbeat's terror had been mounting, drink by drink. He had put in enough poison to fell a rhino. His former assistant was very merry

indeed, but she showed no signs even of a mild tummy upset, let alone death by weed-killer. "I'm going to answer the door," Penny slurred. "If I should return during my absence, please notify me."

Wingbeat had noplacé to go. The apartment was of the bed-sitting room variety with kitchenette attached. His alternatives were to hide in the bathroom or a closet or else stay put and face the visitor.

When it turned out to be Corliss, with an expression on her face of curiosity mixed with repressed fury, Wingbeat panicked. He had never been so terrified in his life. His mind couldn't produce a logical assessment. All it could contribute was the idea, "Out, out, out!" His wife was blocking the doorway, flanked by Penelope Good, who was smirking from one shell-like ear to the other. The window! There was no other escape route.

Flinging aside a length of curtain, he hoisted the sash and stepped through onto the iron-barred platform of a fire escape. A paved parking lot lay three floors below.

"I wouldn't!" his hostess called.

As if to substantiate her warning, the rickety construction squealed, a couple of rusty bolts slipped out of crumbling concrete moorings, and the fire escape swung out and away from the wall. "Hey!" Walter yelled. Now he really had something to be afraid about.

Corliss and Penelope were framed in the open window. His wife did the usual—she demanded something from him that he could not deliver. "Get back in here!" she yelled.

The English girl was shrieking with delight. "You look so funny! I love it! Your wife showed up and you actually— This is fabulous!" And then, having spent a part of her life being pummeled and battered in an English private school, and on her holidays falling out of boats or off of mountains in Europe, the bold young woman said, "Hang on, love. I'm coming to get you."

Wingbeat watched her kick off her shoes. He stared in fascination as her nylon-clad toes took purchase on the window ledge. "Don't move," she said. She tried a step forward onto the platform. It was too far away from the wall. "Give me your hand. And hold on. We'll drag you back."

It was a moment of focus. Walter Wingbeat saw his manifold fears now combined in the person of this optimistic girl. She had taken over his job. He was afraid to pass the terrible news on to his wife. The future was unbearable. If only Penelope Good did not exist.

Her arm was extended, her hand inches away. The decision was

made for him by a survivor inside, a Wingbeat of whose existence he was only dimly aware. He grasped her hand, took his tightest grip, then gave a sudden, ferocious pull. It was as if he was taking her to him and her face brightened mischievously, but only for a split second, because there was no place for her to go but down. She swore, two blunt words he was surprised to discover in her vocabulary. A moment later, she was spread-eagled between cars on the pavement. The building superintendent, who had been watching the drama, ran to examine the body.

Corliss raised her eyes. They met his. The glance asked many questions as it seemed to supply some answers. No heroine, Corliss Wingbeat solved the risky problem simply. "Get in here," she snapped. And her husband obediently took a long stride forward onto the window ledge and allowed himself to be dragged inside.

The super's testimony backed up the story of the surviving couple. It was embarrassing for the Wingbeats, but there was no case against them. Fleeing husband, angry wife, brave mistress accidentally falls to her death. Misadventure.

The Wingbeat case could not be dismissed so easily at the office, however. Norman Imrie was a bit of a prude. Such goings-on between employees of his ad agency were not acceptable. So the offending department head had to be retired early. But the liquor tycoon was nothing if not fair. The man ought not to be penalized financially. Imrie let it be known that Wingbeat should receive his full pension. And it was done.

For the first time in his life, Walter Wingbeat had nothing to be afraid of. His income was guaranteed, his pension linked to the inflation rate. He had nothing to do these days but work around the garden and spend some time handicapping the thoroughbreds at Blue Bonnets. A few days later, Corliss came to where he was sitting on a bench by the garden shed. She had a cup of coffee for him and a suspicious frown on her face. She sat down.

"Spill it, Walter. You were up to something. A philanderer you're not."

He decided to level with her. "She was about to take over my job. I wanted to get rid of her. I put weed-killer in a bottle of Yucca liqueur and gave it to her. The poison could never be tasted in that horrible stuff. The reason I went to her apartment was so that nobody else would drink some accidentally. But it had no effect, the powder must have lost its potency."

"Fortunately for you. You must have been crazy." She showed him affection over his foolish behavior. "Had she died like that, there would have been an autopsy. They'd have discovered the poison. You gave her the bottle, you'd have been hauled up in court."

Wingbeat shrugged. "I wasn't thinking straight. Anyway, it didn't happen."

Corliss Wingbeat's fond mood lasted for the rest of the day. She decided to make her husband a bowl of his favorite vanilla pudding. Nobody else liked it, he could have what was left of the nearly full box of pudding powder she had found inside the pedalbin a few days ago. She asked Pip if he'd thrown it out and he said no, but who else would have done it? Maybe he was afraid he'd be given the hated pudding for dessert one day.

The boy fled that confrontation wondering if he should have spread the weed-killer around the garden instead of substituting it for something harmless. But somebody would have noticed the powder on the ground and he might have been observed had he tried to dig it in. Trust his mother to inspect the trash. Never mind—as long as the stuff was thrown out, it didn't matter that she suspected him of putting it there. Thus Philip Wingbeat worried the matter round and round. He had noticed that as he got older, he was more frightened of things.

In the kitchen, Corliss got out the pudding powder and the milk and a bowl and a whisk and gave herself a few minutes' exercise whipping up the mixture. When it was set, she brought it into the garden, where Walter was resting on the lounge swing with a pen and a pad and the daily racing form. "Here," she said, handing him the bowl and a spoon. "Just to let you know how I feel about you."

"Hey!" Wingbeat said. He scooped up a spoonful and swallowed it. It tasted odd—milky and bitter—but he was afraid to say anything that might destroy Corliss's friendly mood. So, with appropriate noises, he wolfed down the entire nasty mess while his wife watched and wondered how much longer she could survive, shackled to this irritating man.

"Q"

a **NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by**

EDWARD D. HOCH

Sheriff Lens and his wife both swore that Arturo had gone back up to the trapeze platform, too. They'd had an excellent view from their seats at the end of the tent.

Dr. Sam pondered over it and came to no real conclusion. "Five brothers went up originally. Two fell down into the net, but those two both went back up. Three were still up there, and two joined them. Three plus two equal—four?"

"It's some sort of publicity stunt," Sheriff Lens grumbled. "Let's just forget about it . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE INVISIBLE ACROBAT

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

⁶⁶**W**e'd had our share of carnivals and fairs in Northmont," old Dr. Sam Hawthorne said as he poured two glasses of sherry and passed one to his visitor, "but it was the summer of 'thirty-three when the first really big circus came to town. It sorta put Northmont on the map that July, drawing visitors from as far away as Hartford and Providence and Springfield . . ."

It was some quirk of scheduling (Dr. Sam continued), something about a new fairgrounds in one of the cities not being ready on time, that brought the Bigger & Brothers Circus to Northmont for their mid-July dates, on the theory that increasing auto travel made it an easily accessible location for all of southern New England. Sheriff Lens learned of it only a month in advance, when the signs and billboards started going up.

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Bigger & Brothers, one of the first circuses to travel by rail rather than wagon, needed several acres of land near a railroad siding. Pop Wharton's farm seemed the ideal location, especially since it had been standing idle since his hospitalization. Pop was a patient of mine, a man in his late sixties who'd led a vigorous, productive life until severe rheumatism laid him low. His son Mike wasn't interested in farming the land, and he'd persuaded Pop to accept the circus offer and earn a little money while the farm was standing idle.

The circus train rolled in during the small hours of Monday morning, and at seven o'clock I'd promised to go see it with Teddy Lens, the sheriff's eight-year-old nephew who was visiting from Boston. His father was unemployed, a victim of the Depression, and I figured with the sheriff and his wife tending to Teddy for the summer there was one less mouth for them to feed back home. He was all boy, a lively kid who'd been looking forward to the circus since his arrival in Northmont.

"Is it in yet?" he asked me, clambering into my sporty roadster.

"Supposed to be. Let's go see."

"This is a neat car, Dr. Sam."

"Thank you." I grinned as I drove out toward the Wharton farm. The idea of elephants and acrobats excited me almost as much as Teddy. I felt as if I was playing hooky from my practice.

We weren't disappointed. The first thing we spotted as the car topped the last hill was a pair of elephants helping to put up the main tent. There must have been close to a hundred people working around, unloading railroad cars, positioning the animals' cages, erecting tents and banners. I parked the car and took Teddy firmly by the hand, not wanting him to run off in front of one of those big bull elephants.

"What have we here?" a jolly man with a walrus moustache and wearing a leather jacket asked, spotting us and coming forward. "Brought your son to see the big top going up?"

"Well, he's not my son, but that's what we're here for. I'm Dr. Sam Hawthorne. I have a practice in Northmont. This is Teddy Lens, the sheriff's nephew."

Teddy shook the man's hand.

"I'm George Bigger," the man said, shaking hands. "This is my circus." He beamed down at Teddy.

"I'm pleased to meet you, sir. Will I get to meet Mr. Brothers, too?"

The man laughed. "There is no Mr. Brothers, son. That's the Flying Lampizi Brothers. You'll see them at the show—all five of them." He pointed at one of the big circus banners going up. It showed five dark-haired young men swinging and spinning through the air high above the sawdust rings. In the painting one had just released his grip on the trapeze and was heading for a catcher who hung by his knees from another trapeze.

"Wow!" Teddy exclaimed. "Are there clowns, too?"

"Are there clowns?" Bigger glanced around and called out to a slim man nearby. "Harvey, this boy wants to know if we've got clowns!"

The man turned toward us and approached, his face already covered with clown makeup. Silently, he whisked a hand into one baggy sleeve and produced a bouquet of paper flowers he presented to Teddy, then duplicated the trick with his other sleeve, bringing forth a live baby rabbit. He gave Teddy the rabbit, then bowed to us with a grin and moved on.

"That's Harvey the Clown," George Bigger explained. "He never talks, but he makes people happy."

"He sure made me happy!" Teddy exclaimed, stroking the fuzzy little rabbit. "Can I keep him, Dr. Sam?"

"You'll have to ask your aunt and uncle," I replied, amused at the thought of Sheriff Lens confronting a pet rabbit.

"You're our first visitors, so here's something else for you," Bigger said, handing me two tickets to the afternoon performance. "I hope we'll see you both right down front."

"We'll be there," I promised. Until that moment I hadn't planned to bring Teddy to the circus that afternoon, but seeing the joy on his face there was no way I could back out.

A tall woman, quite lovely, with glistening black hair that reached halfway down her back, came up to join Bigger. "This is my wife Hilda," he told us. "You'll see her riding bareback."

Hilda gave us a perfunctory nod and told him, "You'd better come, George. They're having some trouble unloading one of the tiger cages."

"All right. Duty calls, folks. I'll see you later."

Teddy and I looked at the animals and watched the tents going up for a while, then I took Teddy home to prepare for his big afternoon.

Sheriff Lens and his wife Vera decided to attend the circus that

afternoon, too. They got seats farther back, at one end, and we waved to them from our fourth-row vantage point. They weren't really seats at all—only marked-off sections of wooden bleachers—but that didn't matter to Teddy, who was having the time of his young life. First came the circus parade, with animals and performers trooping past us—with Hilda, the bareback rider, and the five Lampizi Brothers in their spangled tights and sad-faced Harvey the Clown tooting a little horn like Harpo Marx.

After the last of the animals and performers had departed, George Bigger took the spotlight in traditional ringmaster's attire, doffing his top hat and bowing with a sweeping gesture to announce, "Welcome! Welcome to Bigger and Brothers Circus, the greatest show under a tent! We'll amaze and electrify you, confound and surprise you, tickle and delight you for the next two hours. Keep your eyes open, because there will often be action in all three rings and in the air above your heads. We'll begin with the Amazing Hilda, queen of bareback riders, and her death-defying stunts on a pair of wild horses!"

Hilda made her grand entrance balanced astride two grey horses that galloped side by side. Teddy was wide-eyed at the spectacle. I was a bit wide-eyed myself, since Hilda Bigger showed off a great deal of her lovely body in the brief sequined costume she wore. She did a number of acrobatic tricks, including a somersault on horseback that had the crowd cheering and applauding.

Then the colored spotlights shifted to the entryway once again as a ragtag band of clowns, headed by Harvey, made a stumbling, slapstick entrance. "There's Harvey!" Teddy shouted in recognition, tugging on my sleeve.

"That's him, all right."

Harvey produced a live duck from inside his baggy jacket, then pretended to fall down in amazement as the other clowns pummeled him. He seemed to remember us from that morning and came up a short way into the stands to award Teddy a colorful cardboard medal. Then he returned to the sawdust as another clown batted him with a rubber club.

There was a sudden blare of trumpets from the circus band, and while the clown brigade still held forth the spotlights picked out the five acrobats running into the center ring where a net had been pulled into place. From somewhere unseen, Bigger's voice boomed over a loudspeaker. "Ladies and gentlemen, the stars of our show—the five Flying Lampizi Brothers!"

The five dark-haired young men bowed and gyrated, letting the spotlights catch the glitter of their spangled tights. Each costume was a different color—white, pink, blue, yellow, and green—and the five certainly looked enough alike to be brothers. Bigger went on to introduce them. "That's Arturo in white, Nunzio in pink, Giuseppe in blue. Ignazio is in green and Pietro in yellow. Let's give them a great big hand!"

Then the brothers went into their act, briskly climbing the rope ladders to the highest reaches of the great tent and stepping onto the wooden platforms. Arturo was the first to swing, his great leap into space carrying him to a firm grasp of the trapeze. The crowd cheered, and the other brothers followed him with a dazzling display of aerial gymnastics. They seemed so sure of themselves that once during a particularly tricky maneuver when Nunzio and Arturo fell to the net, the spectators laughed and cheered, assuming it was part of the act. Perhaps it was—Harvey and his clowns frolicked around the fallen men as if in a carefully rehearsed routine. Meanwhile, up above, the remaining three brothers kept up their acrobatics without missing a beat.

The spotlight followed Nunzio as he climbed the ladder to rejoin his brothers. The colored lights were dazzling now, shifting around the tent with a maddening irregularity. I watched Giuseppe and Pietro link up on one trapeze, then swing back as Pietro caught Ignazio in midair. Arturo, who seemed to be in charge, was now up and waiting on the platform as the empty trapeze swung back toward him. He caught it easily and launched himself after his brothers.

It took me a few moments to realize that something was wrong, and then the thought only dawned on me gradually. The colored lights, the cheers and gasps of the crowd, the swinging, hurtling bodies—suddenly, instead of five brothers, there seemed to be only four. I counted again, checking the colors. Blue, yellow, white, green. The brother in pink was missing. Nunzio.

"Do you see the brother in pink?" I asked Teddy.

"No. Where is he?"

"I don't know. Maybe he fell in the net." But I knew that wasn't true. There had only been the one fall.

Now the brothers themselves seemed aware Nunzio was missing. They were huddled in conversation on one of the wooden platforms. Down below, George Bigger had reappeared in his ringmaster's costume. "Let's have a great big hand for the Flying Lampizi Brothers!" he shouted.

The four swung out on the trapezes and dropped gracefully into the safety net, one after the other. Giuseppe, Pietro, Arturo, and Ignazio. No mention was made of Nunzio, and as the brothers ran off to the cheers of the crowd the lion and tiger cages were already being wheeled in for the animal-training act.

"Will you be all right here alone for a few minutes?" I asked Teddy.

"Sure, Dr. Sam. Where you goin'?"

"Just outside. Don't wander away—stay right here." I knew Sheriff Lens and his wife could see him from where they sat, so I wasn't too worried about leaving him.

I made my way down to the sawdust-covered ground and out the wide entryway through which the acts appeared and departed. George Bigger was standing with his hat off, talking heatedly with the four brothers. "What happened?" I asked Arturo. "Where's your brother?"

"He is gone," Arturo said simply, spreading his hands wide. "He was there and then he was gone."

Sheriff Lens had seen me leave my seat and had followed me out. "What's up here?"

"One of the acrobats seems to have disappeared."

"*I thought* there were five at the beginning."

Bigger's wife Hilda came running up in her glistening costume. "He's not in the sleeping wagon."

"It looks like we've got a problem," Bigger said with a frown.

"The man couldn't just vanish," I insisted. I'd known a few who had, over the years, but not without the assistance of some elaborate trickery. "When did you notice he was gone?"

"I'd just done my flying double somersault," Ignazio said. "Nunzio was supposed to follow me. I looked around on the platform and he wasn't there."

"Could he have fallen into the net?" I asked.

Arturo, the senior brother, replied. "He did fall, earlier. I fell with him. But we both climbed back up."

"I know. I saw him." I turned to Sheriff Lens. "You must have seen him climb back up, too, Sheriff."

"I remember seeing this fella going up the ladder," he replied, nodding to Arturo. "Don't know about the other one."

"Well, I saw him. I saw him go up, but I can't be certain I saw him afterward. The trapeze area is fairly dim when the lights aren't on it."

"There's nowhere he could have gone," Bigger insisted. "Unless he climbed through the top of the tent."

"Might he have done that?" I walked far enough outside the tent so I could see the top. There was certainly no one on it now.

"No, I just said that," Bigger explained. "The canvas fits snugly around the poles supporting it. You don't want water coming in if it rains. Besides, the acrobat platforms are about ten feet below the canvas. He couldn't have climbed higher without someone noticing."

"Whatever happened to him, somebody musta seen it," the sheriff said. "You got several hundred people inside there."

"He'll turn up." Hilda didn't sound too certain.

They were all standing there, not knowing what to do, so I decided to go back to Teddy. Sheriff Lens followed along. "Circus people are odd ones," he said. "I remember once—"

"Sheriff!" I stopped.

"What is it?"

His eyes were on the cage where a lion tamer with whip and gun was keeping the big cats on their pedestals. But I was looking upward, toward the top of the tent. There was no one to be seen up among the ropes and pulleys, and no one on the platforms, but an empty trapeze was swinging back and forth, as if supporting the weight of an invisible acrobat.

Giuseppe and Pietro climbed the rope ladder to investigate the swinging trapeze, but when they returned to the ground they could tell us nothing. "Perhaps a little breeze," Pietro speculated.

"I don't think so. It was too regular for a breeze. Besides, I just heard how tightly the canvas fits." I had checked to see that Teddy was all right and then come back outside with the four Lampizi Brothers. Harvey and the other clowns had appeared from somewhere, ready to make a reappearance as the animal act ended.

"Did you see anything of Nunzio?" Bigger asked Harvey. The sad-faced clown shook his head. I still didn't know whether he was actually able to talk or not.

Sheriff Lens had gone back to his seat, mumbling that there was nothing to investigate, but the strange disappearance of Nunzio Lampizi bothered me. "Enjoying the circus?" I asked Teddy as I returned to my seat.

"It's super, Dr. Sam! That lion tamer had a tiger jumping through a hoop! And then he set the hoop on fire and the tiger jumped through it again—right through the flames!"

My eyes had wandered back to the trapeze overhead. It seemed to be moving again. A few moments later, when the brothers reappeared for the final part of their act, I could see they noticed it, too. As Arturo led the way up the ladder, perhaps not as briskly this time, he turned to watch the errant trapeze. For most of the spectators, those who noticed it at all, this seemed to be part of the show. But I knew something weird was happening.

Then Pietro swung out on one of the other trapezes, transferring to the ghostly, swinging one without mishap, and from then on the act proceeded normally. When it ended, with no mention of the missing Nunzio, Hilda reappeared on horseback to lead the show's finale, a noisy charge of cowboys firing blank cartridges into the air.

Then George Bigger's voice came over the loudspeaker, telling us that the performance was over and to spread the word about it. The show had run barely one hour and forty minutes, some twenty minutes shy of the promised two hours, and I wondered if that much had been cut because of Nunzio's disappearance.

As we left, I spoke to some of the people around Teddy and me, trying to confirm what I had seen. Yes, there had been five brothers at the beginning and no one seemed certain what had happened to the fifth one. Everyone noticed he'd disappeared along the way, and expressed curiosity about it. One woman suggested he'd injured himself when he fell into the net, but an older man assured her he'd climbed back up after that. Several people agreed that the one in the pink tights had climbed back up to the platform after falling.

And Sheriff Lens and Vera both swore that Arturo had gone back up, too. They'd had an excellent view from their seats at the end of the tent.

I pondered over it and came to no real conclusion. "Five brothers went up originally. Two fell down into the net, but those two both went back up. Three were still up there, and two joined them. Three plus two equal—four?"

"It's some sort of publicity stunt," Sheriff Lens grumbled. "Let's just forget about it."

As the four of us walked across the dusty parking lot toward my roadster and the sheriff's sedan, I saw a man in clown makeup heading away from the circus grounds, out across the field toward the Wharton house. "Look at that," I told the sheriff. "Seems a bit odd."

"Stop there a minute!" Sheriff Lens bellowed. "Come back here!"

The clown broke into a fast run and I was after him. I was still

in my mid-thirties back then, and in pretty good shape. Over the rough ground I caught him quickly, knocking him off-balance so that we both went down. "What's your hurry?" I asked, keeping a grip on him.

"I didn't do nothin'," he said. "Lemme go!"

Sheriff Lens came running up. "Are you one of the circus clowns?"

He stood up, brushing himself off. "No, I ain't."

"Then you can be arrested for trespassing."

"Like hell I can!" he shot back, and suddenly I realized who was beneath the clown makeup. "I'm Mike Wharton. My dad owns this land."

Sheriff Lens gaped in genuine amazement. "Suppose you explain what you're doing here in a clown getup," I suggested. Although I knew his father, I didn't know young Wharton very well.

His shoulders drooped a bit as he pulled off the red-rubber nose and wiped some of the greasepaint from his face with a cloth from his pocket. "I—I don't know. It's something I always wanted to do. I told Bigger I'd lease him the farm for a week on the condition that he let me perform as a clown with the circus."

"Now I've heard everything," the sheriff muttered.

"I suppose clowning is a noble calling," I said to Mike Wharton. "But why were you running away just now?"

"I didn't want to get involved," he said.

"Involved in what?"

"That acrobat who disappeared. I figured the cops would be questioning people. I seen Sheriff Lens here nosin' around already. I didn't want my old man to find out I was bein' a clown. He'd say it was stupid."

"How'd you know about the acrobat?"

"I heard Harvey tellin' about it."

"I'm glad to know he can talk when he wants to."

"So I just lit out before anyone questioned me."

"Did you know Nunzio, the missing man?"

Wharton shrugged. "They all look alike to me. I seen 'em all. I talked to 'em, but I don't know which is which." He was obviously eager to get away.

"Go on," Sheriff Lens said. "We know where to find you if we got any more questions."

"Okay," Wharton said and ran off across the field like a fox suddenly freed from a trap.

"Do you think he knows anything about it?" I asked the sheriff.

"Naw, the kid barely knows the time of day. Pop Wharton sure got blessed with a pair of losers." I knew he was referring to the Wharton daughter, Isabelle, who'd run off years before with a boot-legger and was never heard from again.

I stared across the field at the vacant farmhouse, wondering whether anyone would ever live there again. Mike had taken a room in town months ago, apparently not wanting the burden of the farm once his father was hospitalized. Now the old place stood empty, with no one inside to hear the circus music or the laughter of children.

I went back to the house with the sheriff, Vera, and Teddy and was persuaded to stay for a light supper. Teddy was full of talk about the circus, unaware that he'd seen anything out of the ordinary. I was beginning to think I hadn't, either. The missing Nunzio would probably reappear in the next town. For all I knew, he might repeat his vanishing stunt at each performance.

But a bit later that evening, when I returned to my apartment, a reporter named Jeff Slattery was parked outside waiting for me. "I'm from the Springfield paper," he explained, showing his press card. "Someone called in a report that one of the circus acrobats disappeared during the performance of the Bigger & Brothers Circus here today."

"Why are you coming to me about it?" I asked.

"I already spoke to George Bigger at the circus. He confirmed that it happened and gave me your name as a witness. He says the sheriff saw it, too."

I studied the young man more closely. He wore his fedora back on his head and his tie was loose at the knot, probably in imitation of the way big-city reporters were supposed to dress. I was surprised there wasn't a press pass tucked into his hatband. I started to tell him what I had seen.

"Bigger says the empty trapeze was actually swinging, as if the missing acrobat was still there, but invisible. Did you see that?"

"Yes, I saw it. A stiff breeze might have caused it."

"The air was pretty calm today."

I shrugged. "Look, go ahead and write the story any way you want."

"They say you've had some experience solving mysteries."

"A little."

"You gonna solve this one?"

"I haven't been asked. And I'm not sure it *is* a mystery."

"Seems pretty mysterious to me."

As he was leaving, I thought of a question for him. "Who phoned in the story? Did they give a name?"

"Nope. Just said they were at the circus and saw it happen. A man's voice. I figured it was worth a trip down here."

"Was it?"

"Well, this fellow Nunzio Lampizi sure is missing. That's good enough for me."

I left him and went in the house, thinking that whatever was going on, it needn't concern me.

The telephone was ringing as I entered the apartment. It was my nurse, April, wondering how my day had been. "Did Teddy enjoy the animals?"

"The animals and the clowns and everything. He was delighted with it all. Were there any emergencies?"

"Nothing important. Mrs. Mitchell has her usual trouble. I told her you'd be out to see her in the morning."

"Fine."

"Sam—"

"What?"

"On the way home tonight, I passed the Wharton place just as it was getting dark. There was a light in Pop Wharton's bedroom."

"Isn't he still in the hospital?"

"Of course. That's why the light struck me as odd."

"Probably that son of his. Maybe he's letting some of the circus people use the house or he's using it himself while the circus is here."

"Will you be going right out to Mrs. Mitchell's in the morning or stopping by the office first?"

"I'll come in first. Thanks for calling, April."

"Good night, Sam."

I hung up, trying to remember when it was she'd stopped calling me Doctor Sam.

In the morning I was up early. I decided to swing by the Wharton farm, for no good reason except curiosity. When I reached the old frame house, I could see a light still burning in the upstairs bedroom. Even in the morning brightness the naked glow of the ceiling bulb could be seen through the lace curtains. Beyond the house, across the fields, the circus tents stood like desert sentinals. I thought I

heard the distant trumpeting of a bull elephant, but here all was quiet.

Too quiet, I decided.

People in Northmont didn't leave bedroom lights burning all night.

The knob of the front door turned at my touch and I pushed it open. "Mike!" I called out. "Mike Wharton! Are you here? It's Dr. Hawthorne."

There was something red lying on the stairs to the second floor. It was Mike's rubber nose. No answer had come to my shouts. I picked up the nose and started up the stairs. The lighted master bedroom was empty, the smooth spread on the bed untouched. I moved down the hall to the next room and opened the door.

As I snapped on the light I was assaulted by a rainbow of garish color. The pink walls were covered with paintings and photographs, many clipped from magazines, all of them of clowns—circus clowns, movie clowns, even a picture of Caruso in his role as Punchinello. And on the floor in the center of it was what I first thought was a crumpled dummy in a clown costume—but then I saw it was a man, lying face down on a large stain of dried blood.

"Mike," I heard myself say and I bent to turn over the body, searching instinctively for any sign of life.

But it wasn't Mike Wharton in the clown costume this time. I was pretty certain it was someone I'd only seen at a distance before—the missing acrobat, Nunzio Lampizi.

After Sheriff Lens and the state police finished with the crime scene, I waited around until the other Lampizi Brothers were brought over to identify the body. Arturo cursed and Giuseppe cried, and all agreed it was their missing brother. Death had been caused by a half dozen stab wounds to the chest area, at least one of which had penetrated the heart. There was no sign of the weapon.

"I would guess he died early last evening," I told the sheriff. "We'll know better after the autopsy, but the blood is pretty well dried into this rug and April saw a light on here when she was driving home from the office."

"That woulda been soon after he disappeared."

"Makes sense," I said. "He's still wearing the pink tights under that baggy clown's suit."

"But how'd he disappear from the top of that tent, Doc? We saw him climb up there and he never came down."

"I've got some ideas," I said. "Right now you'd better put out an alarm for Mike Wharton. He seems to be the number one suspect."

"Why would he kill Nunzio? He couldn't have met him before yesterday."

"I don't know. The fact that Nunzio came here to this empty house with his killer might imply some sort of sexual liaison."

"You mean young Wharton and Nunzio?"

"I don't know what I mean, Sheriff. I've got to call on Mrs. Mitchell. Then I might drop by the hospital and visit Pop Wharton."

It was just noon when I reached Pilgrim Memorial Hospital. I checked in with April in the office wing and then went down to check on Pop Wharton. He was alone in the room, a frail man who seemed much older than his sixty-nine years. I glanced through his charts, then sat down beside him and asked how he was feeling.

"Some days are better than others," he replied, his voice thin and wispy. "If only I could get the arms and legs to work."

"Has Mike been in to see you?"

"Not in a couple of days. I suppose he's all taken up with the circus out at the farm."

"Mike always liked circuses, didn't he?"

His eyes clouded over with memory. "All kids like circuses—the animals, the clowns, the acrobats. It's noisy and colorful. Both the kids loved the circus. I guess it got to be an obsession after a while, especially the part about the clowns."

"I saw all the clown pictures in the room at your house."

His eyes met mine. "Crazy, isn't it? But there was no mother to look after them, there was only me. I guess I didn't always know the right thing to do. Sometimes when Mike was bad I'd lock him in his bedroom, but he'd jump out the window and be gone on me. I just wasn't strict enough. I figured losing a mother was enough punishment for a child."

"Do you think the clowns became some kind of mother substitute?"

"I don't know. I know there was something strange about it, not quite normal." There were tears at the corners of his eyes. "It's a terrible thing to lose a child."

Back in the office, April showed me the afternoon newspaper from Springfield. "The reporter fellow, Jeff Slattery, was just in here and dropped it off," she said. The headline read:
MISSING ACROBAT FOUND SLAIN IN BIZARRE CLOWN RITE

"That should sell some papers," I said. "Maybe I'll take it to show George Bigger."

"You're going back out to the circus?"

"It's the only place to be. If I hurry I can catch the afternoon performance."

The show had just started and the parking lot around the big circus tent was jammed with cars and wagons. The news of Nunzio Lampizi's disappearance and subsequent murder had done nothing to damage business. I'd planned to confront Bigger at once, but on the way in I encountered Arturo, the senior brother. I was surprised to see him in his spangled tights, obviously ready to perform.

"The show goes on," he said simply in response to my question. "They come to see the Lampizi Brothers, after all."

"Tell me a little about your brother, Arturo. What sort of man was he?"

"More a boy than a man. He was barely twenty."

"Did he have girl friends?" I asked.

"Sure! Lots of girl friends."

"In the towns?"

"Sometimes. He had one in the circus, too. He was just like me at that age."

Harvey and the other clowns came running off and George Bigger appeared in his ringmaster's outfit. "No time to talk now," he said as I approached him. "See me after the performance."

"Just a quick question. How did you happen to pick Northmont for the circus?"

"Somebody here in the circus knew about it and thought it would be a good place—I forget who. Step aside, will you, Doc? Hilda's coming through on her horses."

I watched the horse act and got my first good look at the lion tamer's performance. Then I concentrated on the Lampizi Brothers, watching the way the lights played on them as they flew through the air. When they took their bows, the spectators went wild.

"Are you waiting for my husband?" Hilda asked as the performance ended.

"That's right."

She seemed worried. "Look, we don't want trouble."

"Seems like you've got it already. Murder is always trouble."

"I don't mean the murder. I mean—"

Suddenly George Bigger was at her side. "Shut up, Hilda," he

said. "You talk too much." The spectators were filing out and a few came over to get Hilda's autograph on their programs.

I pulled her husband aside. "This is a murder investigation, Mr. Bigger. Sooner or later the truth is going to come out."

"The truth about what?"

"About the disappearance of Nunzio Lampizi being a publicity stunt, just as Sheriff Lens thought from the beginning."

"You're crazy." His eyes took on a frightened look. "What kind of publicity stunt is murder?"

"I'm not talking about the murder right now. That's something else. I know how Nunzio disappeared. When he and Arturo fell into the net, the gang of clowns swarmed around and helped them down. One of them slipped a baggy clown suit onto Nunzio and he went out with them."

"Everyone saw him climb back to the platform," Bigger protested.

"No, not everyone. I saw him and Teddy saw him, and a lot of people sitting in our area saw him. But Sheriff Lens and some others in the end seats spoke of seeing only Arturo climbing back up. With so much happening to divert us, it was hard to keep track of whether there were four or five brothers performing. I asked myself how I knew I'd seen Nunzio climb back up, with the brothers all looking somewhat alike and of course I'd never met any of them before. It was the color of their tights, of course. That was the only clue I had to their identities. From my seat, the pink spotlight on Arturo's white tights made me think he was Nunzio. Sheriff Lens, seeing the same acrobat from a different angle, knew it was Arturo."

George Bigger tried to stare me down, but finally he said, "All right, so we wanted a little publicity. What's wrong with that?"

"The empty trapeze swung later because it was pulled by a little black thread, like magicians use."

"Yeah, yeah."

"And you phoned that reporter in Springfield."

"Why not? We phoned 'em in Providence and Hartford, too, but he's the only one who came."

"Who killed the boy, Bigger? Were you afraid he'd tell the truth to the press?"

"Nunzio was like a son to me. I wouldn't have harmed a hair on his head."

We stood uncomfortably as I thought about it, inclined to believe Bigger. It was the clowns who had helped work the trick and spirit

Nunzio out of the ring after he fell to the net. The clowns must be the key to it. And Mike Wharton had been dressed as a clown.

I saw the silent Harvey standing nearby and called him. But instead of coming forward, he retreated into the big tent, now virtually empty of spectators. That was when I realized the truth.

I took off after the running figure. "I know who you are!" I shouted. "You can't get away!"

Harvey was headed toward the opposite exit, but Sheriff Lens had appeared there, accompanied by Jeff Slattery. Harvey looked around, his clown face twisted in panic, and suddenly he started climbing the rope ladder that led to the trapeze platform. I took a deep breath and went after him.

"Doc!" Sheriff Lens yelled. "Don't go up there! Are you crazy?"

Harvey climbed faster, and when he reached the platform he turned and looked down at me, pulling a knife from the folds of the costume. The sheriff was right—I'd been crazy to follow him.

"Come on, Harvey," I said softly, climbing onto the platform to face him. "You've killed one person already. You don't want another death."

The knife was steady as he faced me, and when I took a careful step forward, the blade sliced the air inches from my chest. Whatever was happening on the ground, I couldn't see or hear it. At that moment I was entirely alone with Harvey the Clown.

"You killed Nunzio in your old room at home," I said quietly. "Why did you do that?"

The knife sliced air again, holding me at bay.

"Why did you do that?"

And then Harvey the Clown spoke, in a voice that was barely a whisper. "I'm not Mike Wharton."

"I know," I said, flinging myself forward, hitting the clown around the waist and carrying us both off the platform. Then I was falling through the air, falling for a terrifying eternity until we hit the net.

Harvey the Clown was Mike Wharton's sister Isabelle, the one who'd run away from home years before. "Ran away to join the circus," as I told Sheriff Lens later. "Obsessed by the clowns whose pictures covered her bedroom walls."

"I thought that was Mike's room."

"Mike only dressed as a clown to be near his sister for a brief time. The murder room had pink walls—and that should have told us it belonged to Isabelle rather than Mike. Pop Wharton must have left

it untouched, either too weak physically to do the work or hoping she'd come back someday. And she did. Bigger told me someone at the circus suggested they come to Northmont. I have no doubt it was Isabelle. And that the reason she never talked in her role as Harvey the Clown was so that nobody would realize she was a woman."

"Maybe Mike used his sister's room," the sheriff said.

I shook my head. "Pop Wharton told me Mike used to jump out the bedroom window when Pop locked him in his room. Mike's bedroom was on the first floor."

"Why would she stab Nunzio?"

"Arturo said he had a girl friend with the circus. That had to be Isabelle. When she took him to her house and brought him to that room with clowns all over the walls, something might have snapped inside her—something to do with whatever had driven her from that house in the first place. Or it may have been pure jealousy. Arturo said Nunzio sometimes took up with other girls in the towns they passed through."

Sheriff Lens shook his head sadly. "This isn't going to do Pop any good."

"The sheriff was right," Dr. Sam concluded. "There was talk of a trial, but before it happened Isabelle's mind went and Pop died. Mike hung around, not much help to either of them, and then he, too, ran away. I've never heard what happened to him after he left town. I don't know what happened to the remaining four Lampizi Brothers, either. But I guess George Bigger had his fill of publicity stunts. I know I'd had my fill of diving into acrobats' nets."

"If you come by this way again soon, I'll tell you what happened when a business tycoon tried to grow tobacco near Northmont and make everyone rich. His dream wasn't the only thing that went up in smoke. But that's for next time."



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"Q"

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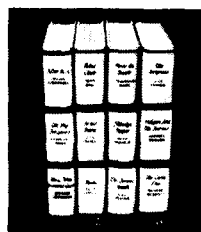
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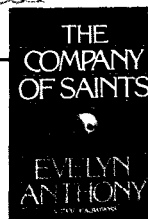
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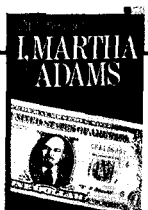
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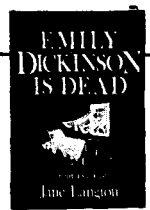
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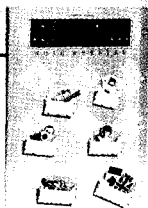
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